Pia Brancaccio

The Buddhist Caves at Aurangabad: Transformations in Art and Religion



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The Buddhist Caves at Aurangabad: Transformations in Art and Religion

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The Buddhist Caves at Aurangabad: Transformations in Art and Religion

By

Pia Brancaccio

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Cover Illustration: Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, Aṣṭamāhābhaya Avalokiteśvara. Photo by author.

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Ai miei genitori Ludovico e Maria Rosaria
ed ai miei figli Ludovico e Viviana
che danno senso a questo viaggio

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

WHY AURANGABAD?

This book should open with a question about its *raison d'être*: Why study the caves at Aurangabad? Twelve main caves are excavated in the slopes of the Sihyachal range branching south from the Ajanta range in northwestern Maharashtra, and they overlook an area now occupied by the sprawling city of Aurangabad (figs. 2 and 3). They reveal an uncommon continuity in occupation and patronage since the time of their foundation in the first century CE until the beginning of the seventh century, and they trace different stages in the development of the Buddhist tradition that still remain poorly understood.

This study is not just an art historical analysis of the Aurangabad caves. This rock-cut site is a conduit through which we can gain a better understanding of many critical issues that shaped the Buddhist tradition and the art and communities of western Deccan for the first seven centuries of the Common Era. The Aurangabad caves are not examined here in isolation but rather are considered as part of a larger cultural and artistic milieu in constant transformation through the centuries. The architecture, iconography, and patronage patterns at Aurangabad reveal the constant intertwining of two worlds, the local and the trans-regional. On one hand the caves speak of local devotees, patrons, kings, and their concerns; on the other hand they record the main changes that Buddhism underwent through the centuries. Aurangabad is perhaps the only cave site in the Deccan Plateau that documents all of the critical moments of the steady growth of a major religious tradition: the first burst of popularity of Buddhist practices in the region, the emergence and consolidation of the *Mahāyāna* creed, and the Buddhist dialogue with an ever stronger Hindu presence, eventually leading to the full affirmation of an esoteric tradition.

Beginning with the second and first centuries BCE, when Buddhism became popular in the Deccan, a large number of cave sites were established around the Western Ghats: among the most well known centers are Bhaja, Junnar, Nasik, Karli, Kanheri, and Ajanta. The creation of the rock-cut complex at Aurangabad marked the culmination of this process: the very first cave at this site, consisting of an apsidal *caitya* hall with interior colonnade and a rock-cut *stūpa*-shaped monument

at its core (cave 4), was likely completed in the late part of the first century CE. The initial establishment of rock-cut Buddhist sites in the western Deccan was unquestionably connected with the emergence of prosperous commercial activities in the area and the creation of an efficient Indian Ocean trade network linking this part of India directly to the Western world. The day-to-day existence of many Buddhist complexes, however, was also tied to the agricultural economy and to the rural landscape of the region. This initial time of Buddhist activity in the western Deccan is generally defined as the '*Hīnayāna* phase'. In this volume, however, the term *Hīnayāna* will be avoided, because its categorical use in antithesis to the term *Mahāyāna* in traditional scholarship does not capture the dynamic complexity of early Buddhist religiosity in the western Deccan.[1]

As time went by, the political and economic geography of the western Deccan underwent significant changes. Some of the early rock-cut sites fell into disuse, while others continued to thrive. Ajanta and Aurangabad found new patronage and prosperity in the fifth century. Caves 1, 3, and 4a were added to the early nucleus at Aurangabad, reflecting a newfound emphasis on anthropomorphic Buddha images developed after the beginning of the Common Era. These units can be closely linked to the Vākāṭaka caves at Ajanta in terms of architecture, art, and patronage. Aurangabad, however, became the visual expression of a new geopolitical order dominated by local rulers striving for supremacy at the time when the Vākāṭakas were exiting the political arena. Aurangabad cave 3, with its devotees and exuberant style, is a testament to the rising power of the periphery versus the center.

During the sixth century CE, a third major series of excavations was undertaken at Aurangabad: caves 2 and 5 and the Eastern group of caves were carved out, making the site a Buddhist landmark in the western Deccan. At this time new cave types were introduced to reflect the changing needs of the devotees, votive panels portraying a hope for a better rebirth and sponsored by individuals lined the walls of sacred areas, and *bodhisattvas* dominated devotional scenes.

[1] Buddhist scholars in recent years have demonstrated the inadequacy of the categorical juxtaposition of the terms *Hināyana* and *Mahāyāna* that have dominated the secondary literature dedicated to Buddhism and its art during the past century. See for example Bechert (1987, 289–269), or Schopen (1997, 23–71). On the historiography see also Hallisley (1995, 31–62).

The last phase at Aurangabad mirrors the significant changes in both politics and religion that occurred between the sixth and seventh centuries across the Indian Subcontinent. Feudalism and an economy increasingly based on land ownership came to be the ruling model, Hinduism and its art triumphed, and esoteric Buddhism began to emerge as a component of this new order. During this time effigies of Hindu gods and goddesses were sculpted next to meditating Buddhas in the so-called 'Brahmanical cave' at Aurangabad, and a four-armed *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara was carved next to a colossal image of the dying Buddha. Female imagery began to dominate the iconography of the caves, a development that raises questions about the nature of patronage and Buddhist practice at this time.

Because of its ever-changing religious and cultural horizon, the Aurangabad complex appears to be unlike any other rock-hewn center in the western Deccan: most cave sites have shorter life spans or reflect punctuated episodes of activity, while Aurangabad mirrors the whole spectrum of a popular tradition. At Aurangabad, each cave displays an original layout and new iconographies. Some caves are filled with votive images and although many units were painted and probably inscribed, no epigraphs or significant paintings survive. This might be why, despite the sculptural exuberance and the accessibility of the caves, only occasionally have they been the object of attention. The wider public often confuses the caves at Aurangabad with the more famous ones at Ajanta, while scholars have focused only on selected iconographic examples from the site, overlooking the development of the whole complex.

The scholarship on the Aurangabad caves is surprisingly meager. A first description of the rock-cut complex appeared in the *Account of Statistics of the Sarkar of Paithan* recorded in 1858 by Bradley and commissioned by the Nizam, the sovereign of Hyderabad state. In 1878 James Burgess published a more detailed discussion of the site (Burgess 1878), and in 1880 most of the caves at the site were discussed in a chapter of the seminal book *The Cave Temples of India* (Fergusson and Burgess 1880). After the publication of an article by Yazdani (1936), the rock-cut complex of Aurangabad became the subject of sporadic scholarly attention, but it continued to be overshadowed by the nearby centers of Ajanta and Ellora.

Only a handful of relatively recent studies on the rock-cut complex of Aurangabad have been published. These consist of two descriptive monographs and a few articles dedicated to specific iconographical

problems. Most relevant are the short contributions on iconography published in the early 1960s by R. S. Gupte, a professor at the Babasaheeb Ambedkar Marathwada University in Aurangabad (Gupte 1960–61; 1963; Gupte and Mahajan 1962); a study by Spink (1967) focusing on relationships between Aurangabad and Ajanta; a brief stylistic analysis of the caves by Levine (1966), who was Spink's student; a contribution by Huntington (1981) on the tantric nature of cave 6; and a study of a Lajjā Gaurī image in cave 2 by Brown (1990).[2]

The first monograph on the caves at Aurangabad was published by Berkson (1986), who comprehended the relevance of the site.[3] The main goal of this volume was to illustrate the site with detailed photographs. The caves are cursorily described and the iconographies freely interpreted by B. Bhattacarya, who collaborated with Berkson on this endeavor. There is no critical analysis in this beautiful volume; it simply presents the caves, with the assumption that they constitute an example of early tantric art in India. Most recently, Qureshi (1998), a former student at Babasaheeb Ambedkar Marathwada University and assistant curator of its museum, has attempted a survey of the cave site in her volume on Aurangabad. This is the only recent analysis dedicated to the caves. Qureshi's work, however, continues to focus on style and iconography, perpetuating the traditional approach to the study of the caves.

It is remarkable that all of the published studies on Aurangabad date to at least twenty years ago, with the exception of the one by Qureshi, despite the fact that the past two decades have seen an explosion of new ideas transforming the fields of Indian art history and Buddhist studies. Recently scholars have begun to question the absolute categories that have conditioned our way of understanding ancient Indian culture. In an attempt to discard labels and redefine the established parameters of knowledge, a different kind of scholarly work has been produced that aims at reconstructing the original socio-cultural atmospheres and the regional contexts and better captures the subtleties of changes.

In particular, the field of Buddhist studies has been extremely active; several scholars have debunked old presuppositions rooted in the early

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[2] A brief note on the discovery of cave 4a by Dikshit (1981) should also be mentioned here.

[3] A descriptive overview of the caves was first published by Amita Ray (1966).

Western scholarship on Buddhist religion. Trying to understand the 'real' Buddhism, the one practiced by the people rather than the one preserved in texts alone, has become the focus of much recent scholarship. The work conducted by Gregory Schopen has been crucial in showing that popular practices rather than pure doctrine kept alive the Buddhist tradition, and that the world of the *saṃgha* was not so removed from that of the ordinary people. Basing his research on epigraphy, art history, and textual analysis alike, Schopen (1997, 2004) has reconciled the divergences among these disciplines, identifying new avenues for future studies.

A greater effort in the field of religious studies has been directed also toward defining the complex nature and goals of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in India. Most *Mahāyāna* textual sources are preserved in languages other than Sanskrit and often in non-Indian traditions; thus, the tireless philological work of scholars like Hubert Durt in *Hobogirin*, Boucher (2008), Harrison (1987), Nattier (2004), Schopen (2005), Silk (2002), and Walser (2004) has been particularly helpful. Examination of inscriptions and texts yields a picture of a multifaceted *Mahāyāna* tradition, very regional and fragmented, that coexisted with more established ones and strived to be widely accepted. Finally, more attention has been devoted to the relationships between specific Buddhist *sūtras* and the Hindu purāṇic tradition and to the emergence of esoteric Buddhism in India.[4] Davidson's (2002) recent work, which examines the critical phase of formation of the esoteric movement, is key in attempting to place it in its appropriate socio-historical context.

In general, the last few years have seen an increasing effort in attempts to reconstruct the social context in which ideas have been produced.[5] Religions, philosophical doctrines, and literary works are no longer perceived as abstract entities developing in a vacuum, but rather as human products that, although lacking the material dimension of art, speak of the same complex realities. In light of all the advancements in scholarship and of a newfound interest in the practices of actual people, a thorough re-examination of the Aurangabad caves is overdue. Aurangabad is a gold mine waiting to be exploited: the site reflects not major imperial or monastic ideologies, but rather the Buddhist

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[4] See Studholm (2002) and Wallis (2002); see also Sanderson (1991).

[5] The field of Buddhist studies has managed to free itself from the dominant approach of nineteenth century scholarship. On this particular issue see Schopen (1997, 1–22) and Lopez (1995).

involvement of ordinary people and local establishments. The caves at Aurangabad, therefore, do not express the orthodoxy of a crystallized tradition; they capture, with their art and architecture, the fluidity of Buddhist practices during the first seven centuries of the Common Era. The caves document transformations and the emergence of new devotional forms that were not recorded in textual sources and therefore had no space in a tradition dominated by the authority of the written word. Today, with a changed intellectual perspective, a comprehensive study of the site will shed light on critical issues dealing with polity and trade in the ancient Deccan, on the nature of *Mahāyāna* Buddhist practices, on the canonization of the *bodhisattva* iconography, and on the formation of the esoteric tradition. Further, such study might offer us more insight into threads of contacts woven among diverse communities in the Deccan plateau and beyond to the northwest during the first seven centuries CE.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CAVES

The caves at Aurangabad are located in the heart of the Aurangabad *tehsil*, which extends between the Ajanta Plateau and the hydrographic basin of the Godavari. The ancient name of this area, however, as well as the name of the ancient settlement closest to the caves, is unknown to us. The city of Aurangabad was founded in 1610 by Malik Ambar on the ruins of a small village called Khirki; only in 1653, when the Mughal prince Aurangzeb became viceroy of the Deccan for the second time did the city acquire its modern name.

The ancient name of the group of Buddhist caves at Aurangabad is also unknown. On the basis of a Brāhmī inscription dated to the second century CE from cave 3 at Kanheri, Gokhale has suggested a possible identification of the locale of the Buddhist complex at Aurangabad as Rajatalaka.[1] The inscription in question refers to a donation of two types of caves (*kuṭi* and *koḍhi*) at a Buddhist *vihāra* located at Rajatalaka in the Paithan district. As the Prakrit word *talāka* in the name Rajatalaka means 'water reservoir', the basis for Gokhale's identification is the assumption that the reservoir located today next to the Aurangabad caves and the modern town existed in antiquity. While no archaeological investigations have been carried out in the Aurangabad territory to corroborate this hypothesis, the topography of the area adjacent to the caves is such that we cannot exclude the possibility that in antiquity a basin existed to collect surface water. However, the identification of Aurangabad with Rajatalaka cannot be based only on such a thin presupposition, especially if we consider that the Kanheri inscription cited by Gokhale is the only document mentioning such a Buddhist site.

The thirteen caves at Aurangabad are clustered in three groups at a height of about 100 metres from the plain below (fig. 3). The first two groups of caves, referred to herein as the western and eastern groups (figs 4, 5, 7 and 8), are located a short distance from each other on

[1] Inscription no. 6, lines 8–10: '…Rājatalāka Paithanapathe saṇa chulika—ya kuṭi koḍhi cha khani ta sada Sevājuya (vihā)re…' (Gokhale 1991, 52).

the same slope and face the fast growing modern urban settlement. A small Buddhist monastery and a temple have been established in recent years below the western group. The western and eastern caves can be reached without difficulty from the Bibi-ka Maqbara and the Marathwada University, and were probably easily accessible in the past as well. They are the most complete groups, with ten units that can be ascribed to different chronological phases, beginning with the early apsidal cave 4, the so-called *Hīnayāna caitya* hall (fig. 42). The third small group of caves consists of three unfinished excavations devoid of any sacred images carved on the northern slope of the same hill, facing away from the modern city. The largest of these unfinished caves has fully carved pillars (fig. 9).

1.1 The Western Group of Caves

Only the caves of the western and eastern groups have been numbered by the Archaeological Survey of India; the last three unfinished units to the north, which are somewhat hard to reach, have not been given 'official' numbers. The numbering system reflects the sequential placement of the caves on the basaltic slope rather than their chronological succession.

The western group consists of six rock-cut units (caves 1, 2, 3, 4, 4a, 5; figs. 4 and 7) and marks the very first location that the Buddhist community chose for the excavation of the rock-cut complex. The early *caitya* hall, cave 4 (fig. 42), is unquestionably the focus of the group: the later caves were carved in sequential proximity to the *caitya* wherever the rock permitted. There are no visible remains of an early *vihāra* at Aurangabad; however, it is possible that a small one may have been established where the modern path reaches the western group (fig. 49). In that particular location, there is an area of collapse where the whole layer of basaltic rock has given way. Considering the geological configuration of the site where the caves are excavated in the basalt directly above of a piroclastic layer, the horizontal collapse of an entire stratum of rock can be easily explained by the supposition that an ancient excavation had removed the lower, supporting bed of rock. The existence of an early cave by the *caitya* hall 4 is also suggested by the position of the later cave 5, high above the early *caitya* hall (fig. 44).

1.1.1 *Cave 1*

This unfinished unit consists of a porch 23 meters long and an interior that has been partially roughed out (figs. 10, 11, 13). Originally intended to be a large *vihāra* comparable to caves 1 and 2 at Ajanta, Aurangabad cave 1 is located high at the southern end of the western group, where large amounts of rock were available for excavation, at about 13 meters above the floor level of the early *caitya* hall 4. A water tank is excavated by the unfinished cave. Work on this cave stopped soon after the carving of the porch, or *maṇḍapa*. The porch has eight richly decorated columns with square bases, round shafts, and ornamented capitals, and it originally included a central projecting section on axis with the entrance; the only surviving parts of this projection of the porch are the square bases of the two front columns.

The facade of cave 1, with a central portal and two unfinished windows as in the Ajanta *vihāras* 1 and 2, was only partially completed (fig. 12). Work on the interior of the cave did not go very far: the inner space extends for the whole length of the porch and penetrates the rock for only 2 and half metres (fig. 13). This roughly carved area still shows marks of the tools used by the rock cutter and indicates the excavation techniques used at the time. It appears that a large pool of variously specialized craftsmen was employed for the realization of this cave, because the excavation advanced simultaneously and uniformly along the 23-metres-long front. Work must have proceeded very quickly: by the time the excavation of the interior was started, the eight pillars of the *maṇḍapa* were already finished and almost completely decorated.

The eight porch pillars are stylistically related to the ones in Aurangabad cave 3 (figs. 14, 34). The two pillars carved on axis with the entrance stand out as being the most ornate ones. They have fluted shafts ringed by octagonal decorated bands and are surmounted by fluted cushion capitals and side brackets. A few brackets still preserve their original decoration: a figure flanked by a small, dwarfish character (fig. 15). The remaining pillars with round or multifaceted shafts are also ringed by ornamental motifs, including lotus flowers, floral patterns, or *mithunas* (fig. 14). They are crowned by *pūrṇaghaṭa* capitals or by square abaci with *kīrtimukhas*. The four central columns have high, square bases embellished at the four corners by *gaṇas* dancing or playing musical instruments.

The portal leading to the inside of the unfinished cave is almost complete; its style recalls the T-shaped doorways of the Gupta period

(fig. 12). Female figures on *makaras* are carved up high on the sides, and the vegetal motifs decorating the lintels are similar to the ones found on the shrine door of *vihāra* 1 at Ajanta. Two large rectangular niches likely intended for sculptures were carved on either side of the area before the porch, which still looks like a construction site, with big chunks of rock *in situ* (fig. 11). A round rock piece with a central cavity that stands next to the projection of the porch was probably employed by craftsmen to sharpen tools. Some time after work stopped at cave 1, large votive panels were added in the unfinished porch on the facade side walls (fig. 12). They all represent a central Buddha in *dhyānāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā* on a lotus supported by *nāgas* flanked by two standing *bodhisattvas*. Outside the porch, to the left, is a rather unusual depiction of seven small Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* added after work at the cave had stopped (figs. 11, 16). These seven identical figures are framed at either end by two standing *bodhisattvas*, the one on the left clearly recognizable as Avalokiteśvara. It is possible that the two flanking *bodhisattvas* were not originally included in the set but were added later to make this panel conform to the common configuration of votive panels, in which a seated Buddha is always accompanied by two *bodhisattvas*. Underneath the panel of seven Buddhas the rock was clearly roughed out for more sculptures, which were never made.

1.1.2 *Cave 2*

Cave 2 (fig. 18) is below cave 1 roughly at the same level of the remaining units in the western group. It is wedged between caves 1 and 3 and occupies a section of the cliff that had not been used by the excavators of the two earlier units (figs. 4, 7). Cave 2, following caves 3 and 1 in the excavation sequence, shows a very distinctive plan, with a vestibule and central shrine surrounded by a corridor (fig. 17). The cave was preceded by a small porch, now collapsed, and was flanked on either side by two rooms and on the right also by a cistern, one of the only two water tanks in the western group. In terms of plan, design, and decoration, cave 2 is very different from the unfinished cave 1 discussed above: it is smaller, simpler, less finely carved, and visually more austere. Cave 2 sculptural decoration consists mostly of devotional images, with no emphasis whatsoever on ornamental details.

The side walls of the porch and those inside the cave are filled with panels haphazardly carved on the smoothed rock surface (figs. 23, 24,

25). In most cases such tableaux depict a Buddha seated on a lotus flower supported by *nāgas* flanked by two *bodhisattvas*, although there are also a few isolated small *bodhisattva* images (fig. 26). The right side of the porch is filled with such small panels (fig. 23); the left wall is dominated by a larger carved composition displaying a Buddha in *dhyānāsana* on a lotus flower with Vajrapāṇi to his left (fig. 22). Flying *gandharvas* crown the composition, flanked by small *dhyānāsana* Buddhas, probably added later.

The *maṇḍapa* is separated from the shrine vestibule and the inner corridor for the circumambulation of the shrine by four square pillars (the two on the side are actually half-pillars) decorated in low relief with large lotus medallions with *mithunas* (fig. 18). The vestibule and the corridor surrounding the shrine are filled with a multitude of heterogeneous sculpted panels, commissioned by different private donors, which typically display a seated Buddha flanked by two *bodhisattvas* much like those carved in the porch of the cave (fig. 26). In the bottom corners of these tableaux are small images of kneeling donors: they appear to be mostly lay people, many of them women, and very rarely members of the *saṃgha*. Further, in this cave, images of a squatting female, commonly identified as Lajjā Gaurī holding a lotus, occur in four instances in the position where we usually find images of worshippers (figs. 27, 28). Some of these panels still preserve traces of pigments, and in at least two instances inscriptions, now almost completely obliterated, must have been painted at the bottom corners of the sculptures, where donors were usually represented (fig. 29).

It seems that when cave 2 was excavated, the *pradakṣiṇāpatha* was intentionally left undecorated to accommodate these attestations of devotion. The panels were first carved in the most desirable and visible parts of the circumambulatory path and then progressively occupied the less well lit back sections of the walls (figs. 24, 25). The dark areas of the corridor behind the sanctum were left completely plain, although the walls were smooth and finished. A comparable arrangement can be seen in cave 5 at Aurangabad, which has a similar plan yet dates to the later phase of activity at the site: there the votive panels are carved only at the entrance of the *pradakṣiṇā*, as patronage ended and the remaining wall surfaces were left plain (fig. 47).

The sanctum is guarded by two large *bodhisattvas* (fig. 19) carved in a style reminiscent of the majestic sculptures in the Great Cave at Elephanta, in the Mumbai harbor. Guarding the shrine entrance are

a princely *bodhisattva* with an imposing S-curved body, the left hand resting on a bow tied on the hip, and a hieratic figure of Avalokiteśvara with a small Buddha Amitābha set in his ascetic hairdo (figs. 20, 21). Avalokiteśvara wears a simple *dhotī*, carries an antelope skin over his shoulder, and holds a looped rope in his left hand (fig. 21). Both *bodhisattvas* stand on lotus pedestals and hold a lotus banner on which sits a small *dhyānāsana* Buddha. Two smaller *nāgarājas* help the *bodhisattvas* by supporting the long and wavy lotus stems.

The doorway leading to the sanctum of cave 2 marks a departure from models recurrent at Ajanta and at Aurangabad in caves 1 and 3 (fig. 19). It is composed of simple lintels, the outer ones reminiscent of wooden columns; it is surmounted by a row of small staggered shrines with small Buddha images in them represented in *dhyānāsana* and different *mudrās*—the central one is in *dhyānamudrā* almost as a counterpoint to the main Buddha in the sanctum in *dharmacakramudrā* and *bhadrāsana*. The main Buddha image in the shrine sits on a throne decorated with *makaras* and *vyālas*, and the interior walls of the shrine are also covered by small heterogeneous votive carvings (about twenty-three small panels) representing seated Buddhas alone or flanked by two *bodhisattvas*.

1.1.3 *Cave 3*

This unit, stylistically related to the unfinished cave 1, is carved in a prominent position adjacent to the *caitya* hall that is the oldest cave at the site (figs. 4 and 7). The location of cave 3 functions as a chronological indicator: this unit probably marked the beginning of a second major phase of patronage at Aurangabad, when the available rock next to the earliest and most sacred *caitya* was occupied. Cave 3 (fig. 32) is the first cave at this site that can be linked to the practice of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, and in terms of conception, layout, and sculptural style appears to be very similar to Ajanta caves 1 and 2, which according to Spink (2007) were some of the last caves to be completed at the site by the Vākāṭakas.

Cave 3 at Aurangabad was conceived to be a *vihāra*, and its plan recreates, on a smaller scale, the atmosphere of the imperial cave 1 at Ajanta (figs. 30, 31). The projecting porch of Aurangabad cave 3 has collapsed, and only the broken bases of its two axial pillars survive. Originally it also included two side chapels, and the cave facade, now very plain, must have once been decorated with paintings much like

the Ajanta *vihāras* 1 and 2 (fig. 32). The interior ceiling of Aurangabad cave 3 still preserves faint traces of painted decorations. This unit is almost unique in its completeness.

The interior hall of the cave is almost a perfect square, measuring 13 by 13 meters, with two square cells and a rectangular chapel opening on the left and right walls (fig. 30). It should be noted that the door hinges of cells do not show signs of wear, suggesting that such rooms likely were never used. The central area of the hall is demarcated on each side by four pillars that, although similar to those seen in Aurangabad cave 1, seem more elaborate and rich in decoration (fig. 33). The shafts of the columns, whether smooth or multifaceted, are all embellished by ornamental bands defining contrasting volumes (fig. 34). The bands are adorned with vegetal motifs, lotus flowers, and figures such as *kīrtimukhas*, fantastic animals, *mithunas*, dancers, and musicians, framed by small squares. The cubic bases of the columns are crowned by medallions with *gaṇas* and at the four corners are decorated by female figures and attendants. The capitals of the columns rest on exuberant *pūrṇaghaṭas* and are embellished by *mithunas*, vegetal motifs, and bracketing *vyālas*. The interior lintel connecting the columns to the ceiling of the cave has a sculpted narrative, possibly a depiction of the Sutasoma *jātaka* on the front side, and a temple motif all around. Two ornate round columns with double brackets separate the hall from side chapels that were once decorated with paintings (fig. 35).

The threshold between the main hall and the shrine antechamber is marked by four fluted columns, two full and two half-columns, ringed by ornamental bands and embellished by elegant *śālabañjikā* brackets at the top (fig. 36). The ceiling of the shrine antechamber has floral paintings similar to those visible in the shrine antechamber of Ajanta cave 1. The shrine doorway is very elaborate, with two *nāgarājas* at the base and a framing row of loving couples reminiscent of the Ajanta visual idiom. Above the door is a series of small, staggered temples with seated Buddhas in them, a motif replicated in most of the later caves at the site.

Inside the sanctum is a majestic *bhadrāsana* Buddha in *dharmacakramudrā* sitting on an elaborate throne, flanked by two standing bodhisattvas holding fly whisks: Avalokiteśvara is represented to the Buddha's right while on his left is a *bodhisattva* with a *stūpa* in the crown, possibly identified with Maitreya (fig. 37). *Apsarās* converge

towards the halo radiating from the Buddha's head. The most extraordinary feature of this shrine is two groups of sculpted life-size kneeling devotees looking at the main Buddha. Six devotees are carved to the right of the Buddha while seven appear to his left, all set against the shrine side walls (figs. 38, 39). They include male and female characters wearing precious jewels and elaborate diadems, and they were clearly executed by a master artist (fig. 40).

1.1.4 *Cave 4*

The *caitya* cave, no. 4, represents the first phase of occupation of the Aurangabad cave complex: the other excavations were all arranged on either side of this unit in chronological succession (figs. 4, 7). Before the site was conserved, traces of foundations in rectangular bricks were visible in the small area facing the unit. Cave 4 consists of a pillared apsidal hall with a rock-cut *stūpa* monument at its core (figs. 41, 42). It betokens the so-called *Hīnayāna* phase of activity, when anthropomorphic images of the Buddha were not yet worshipped in the caves. The facade and parts of the interior of this *caitya* hall have collapsed though the centuries, and much of what we see today has been reconstructed, with the exceptions of the cave's vault, a single pillar, and part of the rock-hewn *stūpa*.

The vault in Aurangabad cave 4 is extremely elaborate and has no counterparts in the western Deccan (fig. 43). Stone ribs reproducing earlier wooden prototypes spring from a raised band decorated with a row of horseshoe arches generally called *caitya* arches. Each part of this small motif echoes the front opening and false windows carved on facades of early rock-cut *caitya* halls such as the one at Karli. Beams and lattice screens appearing within *caitya* arches on cave façades are also reproduced as patterns within the small ornamental arches in Aurangabad cave 4. A series of inverted steps is carved below the *caitya* arches. The now restored rock-hewn *stūpa* monument at the end of the apsidal hall has a high drum and a bulging dome topped by a small balustrade and a *harmikā*.

1.1.5 *Cave 4a*

This unit consists of a small open chapel discovered during conservation work by the Archaeological Survey of India (fig. 44) (Dikshit 1981). The chapel, stylistically linked to caves 1 and 3 at Aurangabad, was severely damaged by the collapse of the cliff and has been

recently protected by a concrete vault.[2] It consists of a Buddha image of the type and size normally found in shrines inside *vihāras*, seated in *bhadrāsana* on an elaborate lion throne decorated with *vyālas* and mythological creatures (fig. 45). Small votive panels depicting standing Buddhas in *varādamudrā* were added later on either sides of the main Buddha. Two small flying *nāgarājas* in *añjalimudrā* are represented on the back of the throne as if flying towards the main image. The main Buddha, in *dharmacakramudrā*, whose feet rest on a lotus flower, is flanked by two *bodhisattvas* standing on lotuses; their identities remain uncertain because of their poor state of preservation. Two small hexagonal columns with rounded bases once stood *in antis*.

1.1.6 *Cave 5*

Located high on the cliff next to the early *caitya* hall and above cave 4a, the simple cave 5 consists of a central shrine surrounded by a corridor for circumambulation (figs. 44, 46, 47). The small porch of this cave has completely collapsed; however, two side cells that once opened onto it are still extant. While the layout of this cave replicates exactly that of Aurangabad cave 2, several features appear unique to cave 5. First, this is the only sanctum where the main Buddha image is represented in *dhyānāsana* and *dhyānamudrā* (fig. 48)—at Aurangabad the main Buddha images in the caves are always in *bhadrāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā*. The Buddha in cave 5 is imposing and recalls in style the Buddha of the cave 2 shrine (fig. 19): its massive head and shoulders contrast with the thin waist and long arms. The conch carved in front of the Buddha's throne was likely added later by Jain followers, who may also have been responsible for whitewashing the cave walls long after the site had been abandoned by Buddhists.

Cave 5 also does not include the traditional large *bodhisattva* images guarding the shrine. Rather, two large matching votive panels are carved in the location usually intended for such *dvārapālas*. These votive panels roughly conform in iconography to the small carvings that fill the walls of cave 2. They depict a Buddha in *bhadrāsana* on a lotus flower supported by *nāgas* and flanked by standing Padmapāṇi and Vajrapāṇi, also on lotuses. Similar votive images also appear on what remains above the entrance to the *pradakṣiṇāpatha* and on the

[2] Walter Spink (2007, 333–335) relates this small shrine to the very last phase of patronage at Ajanta, which he links to the dominance of the Aśmakas in the region.

wall to the left of the shrine. It seems that just as in cave 2, only in the most visible and well-lit areas of the corridor were votive panels carved, while the dark areas and back walls were left completely plain.

1.2 The Eastern Group of Caves

Another cluster of caves is located farther east on the same slope facing the Aurangabad plain, about a mile east from the group just described (figs. 5, 8) The eastern group consists of five caves different from each other in layout, iconography, and function. At the northern end of this cluster, right next to cave 9, two more excavations were attempted and abandoned (fig. 6). The eastern group was established after the excavation of caves 2 and 5: the change in location was probably due to the lack of suitable rock around the earlier nucleus of caves.

1.2.1 *The so-called 'Brahmanical Cave'*

This unique cave was the last to be discovered at the site and does not follow the numbering system locally instituted by the Archaeological Survey of India. It is a rough excavation located at the very southern end of the eastern group and hidden behind huge ledges of rock (fig. 5). This small unit is particularly intriguing because of its association of Brahmanical and Buddhist icons. Its approximate rectangular layout is certainly not the product of the original planning but rather the result of a series of changes and additions to this cave that was never finished. The *mātṛkās* sculpted on the left wall form a set together with Cāmuṇḍā, Gaṇeśa, and Durgā on the back wall (figs. 50, 52). On the right wall there are two large sculptures of Buddhas in *dhyānāsana* and *dhyānamudrā* that do not follow the pattern of votive panles seen elsewhere at the site (fig. 53). While the placement and function of these two images are hard to explain, they are the only large Buddha images at the site that are comparable in iconography to the image in the cave 5 shrine.

The most important feature of this cave is the presence of *Saptamātṛkās* on the left and back wall (figs. 50, 52). Considering the way the images are carved, it seems that the back wall, with Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī on the right, Gaṇeśa in the center, and Cāmuṇḍā to the left, was carved before the remaining *mātṛkās* on the left wall, which include Brahmī, Maheśvarī, Kumarī, Vaiṣṇavī, Varāhī, and

Indrāṇī. All the *mātṛkās* stand on a ledge where the appropriate *vāhanas* may have been sculpted; however, almost no traces remain of their vehicles. An image of Śiva precedes the *Saptamātṛkās* (fig. 51).

1.2.2 *Cave 6*

Cave 6 is located at a slightly higher level than cave 7 and was once decorated with paintings, of which faint traces survive (figs. 5, 8). Traces of painted flower garlands and large medallions on the ceiling suggest that the paintings in this cave, much like those in Aurangabad cave 3, may have been related to those embellishing the ceiling of the Ajanta *vihāras* 1 and 2. The layout of Aurangabad cave 6 is a combination of the central plan seen in caves 2 and 5 and the *vihāra* type in cave 3 at the site (fig. 54). Cave 6 is entered through a *maṇḍapa* with four frontal pillars, all reconstructed by the Archaeological Survey of India, with the exception of the last on the left, having a square base with seated *gaṇas* at the four corners. The circumambulation path starts from the *maṇḍapa* and encloses not only the sanctum but also the shrine antechamber (figs. 54, 55, 56). Six cells open onto this corridor: four are on either side of the cave (one of them has a stone bed), and two are located in the back corners in line with the entranceways of the *pradakṣiṇā* corridor. The back cells are transformed into shrines with images. The entrance to the left back shrine is flanked by two bodhisattvas holding lotus flowers, and inside is a small image of a Buddha in *dhyānāsana* and *dhyānamudrā* with flying musicians above and two bodhisattvas on either side (fig. 57). The right chapel is almost identical to the left one, with the exception that the main Buddha is in *dharmacakramudrā* (fig. 58).

Four square pillars separate the *maṇḍapa* from the shrine vestibule (fig. 55). Two of them are half pillars that adjoin the wall carved with images of *śālabhañjikās* and *gaṇas* facing the entrance of the cave. The vestibule is dominated by two large *bodhisattvas* in *déhanchement* guarding the access to the shrine: they are crowned by flying *gandharvas* and *gaṇas* and are accompanied by attendants (fig. 56). On the right is Vajrapāṇi, holding a *vajra* in his left hand over the bow tied across his waist while in his right hand he holds an unidentifiable broken object (fig. 60). He stands on a lotus flower on which his attendant places the right foot; the crossed arms of this smaller figure echo the shape of the *vajra* associated with the deity. While all of these elements confirm the identity of this *bodhisattva* as Vajrapāṇi, the diadem in his

crown bears the effigy of a *stūpa*. Issues surrounding this iconographical problem are discussed later.

On the left side of the shrine door is a standing *bodhisattva* whose identity is a bit mysterious (fig. 59). His left hand is broken; his right holds an attribute, perhaps a flower that is damaged. To his right is a princely attendant holding a bowl possibly filled with flowers. Small female deities appear by the *bodhisattvas* holding lotus flowers towards the entrance of the shrine.

The shrine doorway is similar to the one we see in cave 2 (fig. 19). It is composed of simple lintels, the outer ones reminiscent of wooden columns, and is crowned by a shrine motif with a Buddha represented inside each of the small, staggered structures. At the bottom of the doorway are two small images of Jambhala seated in *lalitāsana*, just like the ones appearing by the entrance to the cave 2 shrine, as well as two standing *nāgarājas* similar to the ones carved at the bottom of the door leading into the cave 3 sanctum (fig. 36). The layout and the decoration of this cave suggest that the patrons and the artists who worked on cave 6 consciously combined and re-elaborated structural and iconographical motifs found in caves 2 and 3, the most prominent *Mahāyāna* units in the first group.

Inside the shrine is a Buddha in *dharmacakramudrā* seated in *bhadrāsana* on an elaborate throne; he is flanked by two *bodhisattvas*, one of which can be securely identified as Avalokiteśvara holding a lotus flower with a long stalk (fig. 61). The Buddha image seems a bit disproportionate, with a big head and a smaller body, especially when compared to the main Buddhas carved in the sancta of the earlier caves 2 and 3 in the western group. The shrine walls in cave 6 are also filled with small votive images of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*. On either side of the sanctum are two rows of kneeling devotees: all the male figures are represented to the right, while the females are clustered to the left of the Buddha (figs. 62, 63). These sculptures, although certainly based on the ones carved in cave 3 (figs. 38, 39), are stylistically very different from the earlier prototypes and appear to be rather generalized princely characters wearing elaborate ornaments, sculpted with clumsy bodies.

1.2.3 *Cave 7*

This cave stands out within the Aurangabad complex as being the richest and most complex from the iconographical point of view. Its

layout, with central plan and side cells, is similar to the one in cave 6, although the cave 7 shrine vestibule has been opened up (fig. 64). This unit can be accessed through a colonnade of six square pillars (four full and two half; fig. 5) leading into an elaborate *maṇḍapa*; two rectangular chapels with frontal square pillars sit on either sides of the porch, while a central doorway flanked by two windows connects this area to the interior of the cave.

The sculptures in the *maṇḍapa* underscore the tremendous changes that Buddhism experienced in this area after the fifth century CE. In the left chapel is a series of six standing female figures holding lotus flowers, bracketed by a standing Buddha in *varādamudrā* and the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara (figs. 65, 66, 67 and 68). The chapel on the opposite end of the porch hosts a set of two imposing sculptures representing Pāñcika/Jambhala and Hāritī resting in *lalitāsana* on pillows (fig. 69). The corpulent Pāñcika/Jambhala dominates the scene: he wears an elaborate crown and jewels and has a thread across his chest. Hāritī has a majestic hairdo and a body that visually conveys the notion of prosperity, and she holds a bejeweled baby resting on her left leg. The tutelary couple is flanked by two standing female attendants holding flywhisks and lotuses and is revered by flying *gaṇas* above.

The *maṇḍapa* area is dominated by two imposing *bodhisattvas* sculpted on either side of the central doorway leading to the interior of the cave (fig. 70). On the left is a magnificent representation of *Aṣṭamāhābhaya Avalokiteśvara* holding a long-stemmed lotus in his left hand and the *mālā* in his right (fig. 71). He wears a *dhotī* tied and pleated in front and carries a small effigy of Amitābha in his ascetic hairdo. Avalokiteśvara is flanked by eight small scenes in which he, evoked as a savior, rescues his devotees from danger. From the bottom left, Avalokiteśvara rescues his faithful from a shipwreck, from imprisonment, from attacks by an armed man, and from fire (figs. 72, 73, 74 and 75). From the top right his devotees are saved from being assaulted by a lion, by snakes, and by an elephant and are protected from witchcraft (figs. 76, 77, 78 and 79). The small female dwarfish figure in the bottom right vignette as an emblem of witchcraft bears a striking resemblance to a small female attendant to the left of the shrine door in the same cave 7, represented along with other goddesses (figs. 79, 85). The vignettes depicting the miracles are arranged in two vertical series crowned by small Buddha images in *dhyānāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā*. Two flying *gaṇas* are represented in a very three-dimensional way next to the *bodhisattva*'s halo.

On the other side of the doorway is a majestic *bodhisattva* stylistically reminiscent of the large images of Śiva from the Great Cave at Elephanta (figs. 80). The *bodhisattva* to the right of the door in cave 7 stands on a lotus flower and leans to his left, comparable to the Vajrapāṇi image from Aurangabad 6 (fig. 60) or the *bodhisattva* with Avalokiteśvara by the shrine of cave 2 (fig. 20). He wears a tall crown, probably with a *stūpa* in its diadem, and two different kinds of earrings. The *bodhisattva*'s left hand rests on a bow tied on the hip; below him is an attendant, wearing a pointed crown, whose hand rests on a dwarfish creature. To the left of the majestic *bodhisattva* stands a small female deity who rests her hand on the head of a dwarfish female associated with her. The whole iconographical assemblage is complemented by flying couples and *gaṇas*.

A central doorway gives access to the interior of the cave (fig. 70). The portal is very simple, in the fashion of caves 2 and 6; it is flanked by a lintel with two plain columns and is crowned by a motif with staggered shrines projecting over the lintel, with small Buddha images in *dhyānāsana*. At the base of the portal are two short guardians, both resting their left hands on a bow tied around the hips like the large *bodhisattva* with Avalokiteśvara. Two windows open on either side of the facade and are decorated with floral and vegetal bands (fig. 81). A square panel depicting a female goddess bathed by elephants and flanked by two male attendants is carved above each window, while at the left and right corners are two small brackets with female figures.

The interior of the cave has a corridor for circumambulation wrapping around the sanctum (figs. 82, 83, 84). Much like in cave 6, there are eight cells opening onto the *pradakṣiṇā*. The two on the back are in line with the entrances to the corridor and have images in them. A central Buddha in *bhadrāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā* flanked by attending *bodhisattvas* with flywhisks is carved on the back walls of both rooms. The generic iconography of the attending figures is reminiscent of that of the votive panels carved in the caves of the eastern group.

The access to the sanctum is punctuated by two marvelous compositions depicting female deities with attendants—their identity and iconography will be discussed later (figs. 82, 85, 86). The central goddesses in both panels hold lotus flowers and are very ornate; they are generally identified as forms of the goddess Tārā (Huntington 1981; Berkson 1986, 133–145). These unique iconographical assemblages are framed by two half-pillars and a double-beamed roof carved in relief.

It looks as if the female deities stand within a shrine decorated on top by a series of small *candraśālās* with *dhyānāsana* Buddhas, in meditation or teaching, represented in them. Underneath the architectural frames, flying *gaṇas* converge towards the main female deity in the center. These two compositions of female deities mirror each other and must have been planned as a set; they are stylistically similar although carved by different hands. The quality of the sculpture is outstanding, and the modeling of the bodies is unparalleled at the site: the figures are all beautifully carved, with elaborate headdresses and sensuous bodies with plump breasts and large hips. These figures have consistently been considered tantric deities revealing the *maṇḍala* scheme of the cave. However, it should be noted that here they assume the guise of subordinate deities: their defining attributes, the lotus flowers, are held towards the shrine as a sign of homage and respect to the main Buddha.

The doorway to the shrine replicates the outer portal and has two small guardian figures carved at the bottom (fig. 87). The main Buddha image is seated in *bhadrāsana* on an elaborate lion throne decorated with *vyālas* and other mythological creatures; he is in *dharmacakramudrā* and two flying couples converge towards his halo. Flanking the Buddha are not the usual *bodhisattvas* but rather vertical series of three small Buddhas in *dharmacakramudrā* and *dhyānamudrā* comparable to the ones found in the Aurangabad cave 2 shrine. To the right of the main Buddha image, carved out of the wall of the sanctum, is an ensemble of seven female images (fig. 88). The central figure, dominating the composition, is a beautifully carved dancing female also usually identified as Tārā (Berkson 1986, 156–172). She is flanked on either side by three female musicians, seated or crouching, playing the drums, flute, cymbals, tambourine, and tablas, and clapping hands. A few traces of pigment survive, indicating that the panel was painted. Above the figure it is still possible to discern painted curtains, perhaps making reference to the cloth used by performers as a back stage, or to indicate that the music took place in the interior of a palace. All the figures represented are stylistically reminiscent of the carved female deities by the shrine entrance, although here they appear to be somewhat less exuberant and more refined.

On the other wall of the sanctum, facing the group of female musicians to the proper left of the Buddha, is a divine couple, a *bodhisattva* and female deity accompanied by dwarfish attendants (fig. 89). It

may be that such images represent prototypes of later, tantric forms of Avalokiteśvara described in the *Sadhānamālā*, such as Khasarpaṇa Lokeśvara with Tārā.

1.2.4 *Cave 8*

This unfinished cave is almost the only one at Aurangabad created exclusively for residential purposes. It is excavated on the cliff above cave 7 and has a very irregular plan (figs. 5, 8, 90, 91). A steep staircase built in the rock leads to the actual cave, consisting of a small square hall with four incomplete cells irregularly arranged on the sides (fig. 91) The location of this unit high on the cliff may have been due to the presence beneath of an earlier excavation, whose original floor level is still visible (fig. 90). Another possibility is that the cave was made so difficult to access for security reasons: if the area was troubled, it would have made sense to place a residential cave up high to protect its inhabitants. This last hypothesis may be corroborated by the fact the main hall could be sealed with a door placed at the top of the staircase. Certainly after the fall of the Vākāṭakas the Aurangabad region entered a long period of political instability that would justify the choice of a secure *vihāra*.

The layout of this unfinished cave is rather unusual. Only the two cells on the left wall are partially excavated, while of the three doorways carved on the back wall only one leads to an actual cell (fig. 8). The right wall has a small cell and two passages leading into an irregular, unfinished space opening high onto the cliff, with an incomplete porch with two pillars. There are some minor votive images of the Buddha carved on the walls of this open area. The anomalous layout of cave 8 is hard to explain. One could even hypothesize that this hanging porch was not conceived in relation to cave 8 but rather as a second floor for the cave located beneath cave 8, now almost completely obliterated. One last anomalous feature of cave 8 is the placement on the floor of the main hall of a large square socket with a drain around it, possibly to lodge a *liṅga* added much later by Śaiva ascetics who may have taken up residence in the cave after the Buddhists had abandoned the site.

1.2.5 *Cave 9*

Cave 9 is a large, rectangular excavation opening high on the cliff at the easternmost end of the group (fig. 6). Major collapses have altered

the original layout of this unique cave, which includes three separate shrines. The large rectangular area (26 meters by 5.7 meters) functions as a unifying spatial element (fig. 92). A porch opens onto it from which one can access the central shrine antechamber or two side vestibules, all interconnected through small passages (figs. 8, 95, 96 and 97). The central antechamber leads to a sanctum with a large Buddha image barely roughed out (fig. 98). The side vestibules preceded by two frontal columns open onto two additional shrines that have finished Buddha images in *bhadrāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā* (figs. 99, 100). The relatively complete state of the Buddha images carved in the side shrines is striking if compared to the unfinished condition of the main image in the central shrine. Perhaps different patrons were responsible for each of the shrines, or perhaps excavation in the cave proceeded from the sides to the center and a shortage of financial support prevented the stone carvers from finishing the central shrine. On the left wall of the main rectangular hall, carved in a deep niche, is what remains of a colossal Buddha in *parinirvāṇa* (fig. 93). Comparable in size to the *parinirvāṇa* carved on the wall of cave 26 at Ajanta (fig. 151), the recumbent Buddha at Aurangabad appears much more three-dimensional.[3] It is likely that this imposing image, now very damaged, was once painted. At its feet stands a damaged sculpture of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara with four arms (fig. 94). He is represented with his characteristic ascetic hairdo, including the small effigy of Amitābha; in his top right hand he carries a *mālā*, the bottom right hand is in *varādamudrā*, the top left hand is broken, and the bottom left hand rests on the long stem of a beautiful lotus flower.

Two sculpted compositions depicting female deities, flanked by two attendants, are sculpted in the front area of the cave bracketing the entrance to the *maṇḍapa* (fig. 92). These images are broken in the lower part, much like the rest of the sculptural decoration of this cave, damaged by the collapse of the rock. The female figures in this cave, although exuberant in form, cannot be related in terms of visual idiom to the ones in cave 7. Images of female deities holding lotuses and *bodhisattvas* dominate the roughly excavated *maṇḍapa* as well as the side vestibules (figs. 96, 97). Two imposing *bodhisattvas*, which are hard to identify given the lack of specific iconographical marks, guard

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[3] The *parinirvāṇa* at Aurangabad is 5,6 meters long while the *parinirvāṇa* in cave 26 at Ajanta is 7 meters long.

the access to the shrine antechamber in the central *maṇḍapa* (fig. 95). The eastern end of this cave opens onto another small irregular excavation, barely roughed out and completely collapsed (figs. 6, 8).

1.3 The Northern Cluster of Caves at Aurangabad

On the northeastern face of the same massif are three caves situated at different heights on the same slope. Excavation activities must have been interrupted here soon after they began, as two of the three caves have barely been touched. One cave in this location, however, has been partially excavated, revealing a large rectangular porch with partially decorated pillars (fig. 9). A comparison of this unit with the unfinished cave 1 of the western group is especially revealing. In both instances only the porch has been carved; in cave 1 the key architectural components were already fully decorated by the time excavation activities stopped, while in this unit part of the third cluster of pillars had barely been carved. This suggests that the workforce employed in cave 1 in the western group was far more numerous than that engaged in the third, unfinished cluster. It is impossible to reconstruct from what remains the intended plan of this cave, which surely represented the last excavation effort at Aurangabad. The porch of this cave evokes in terms of spatial layout that of a poorly known Brahmanical cave, located 60 km east of Aurangabad near the town of Jalna. The fragmentary sculptural remains from Jalna show similarities with the images of Śiva and the *matṛkās* in the Brahmanical cave of the eastern group at Aurangabad, thus suggesting a late date for all of these unfinished structures.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BEGINNINGS AT AURANGABAD

2.1 Establishing a Chronology

The *caitya* cave 4 at Aurangabad is the only cave that reveals indications of the first phase of occupation of the site (Fig. 42). It was a rather damaged hall, now restored, with a rectangular plan and a rock-hewn *stūpa* at the end of the apsidal colonnade (fig. 41). All the later caves in the western group were carved near it, indicating that the *caitya* hall continued to be considered the sacred core of the complex in later periods (fig. 4). A comparable phenomenon can be observed at Ajanta, where the earliest fifth century CE caves seem to have been placed on either side of the pre-existing excavations dating to the so-called '*Hīnayāna*' phase.[1] It is impossible to date securely the Aurangabad *caitya* hall because of its poor state of preservation and the absence of inscriptions, and so the chronology of the early life of the complex remains a source of debate. However, a foundation date of the first century CE seems probable.

The chronologies of early Buddhist rock-cut temples in the western Deccan have all been established on the basis of two factors: epigraphic study and architectural analyses of the caves. The *caitya* halls in particular have consistently worked as 'guide fossils': by mapping the *caitya* layouts, decorations, and epigraphs, elaborate chronologies of the cave complexes have been formulated. Obviously, both the epigraphic and art historical parameters are intrinsically problematic. The cave inscriptions only rarely mention rulers or epochal dates,[2] which is not necessarily a disadvantage in ancient India, where

[1] According to Spink (2007, 127 and 141) the Ajanta caves 8 and 11, located right next to the early *caitya* halls 9 and 10, were among the first fifth century CE caves at the site.

[2] The only exceptions are the Kṣatrapa and Sātavāhana inscriptions from Nasik, Junnar, and Karli that include specific dates of unidentified eras. Among the five Kṣatrapa epigraphs mentioning Nahapāna from the Nasik caves (Burgess 1883; reprint 1994a nos. 5, 6a, 7, 8, and 9), only inscription 7 includes a specific date: year 42. The Kṣatrapa inscription 32 from Junnar at Manmodi Hill mentions Nahapāna and a regnal year 46, whereas no specific dates appear in Karli inscription 19, which also contains reference

all the kings used different eras hinging on dates unknown to us. In addition, the paleographic tool, an important aspect of the epigraphic analysis, cannot provide absolute chronologies. James Burgess, in his monumental survey of the cave temples of western India first published in 1880, underlined even then the impossibility of establishing a chronology based solely on inscriptions. He argued that architectural elements offer much more valuable information on the relative dates of the Buddhist excavations, the milestone for his architectural chronology being the Lomas Rishi cave in Bihar, anchored by an Aśokan period inscription to the middle of the third century BCE (Burgess and Fergusson 1880). After Burgess, scholars seem to agree that the Lomas Rishi cave, dedicated to Ājīvika ascetics, was the prototype for the Buddhist caves of the western Deccan, and in particular for the *caitya* halls that are so distinctive in these caves. Also, it became commonly accepted that all the cave sites developed more or less between the second century BCE and the second century CE, and that the *caitya* halls of Bhaja and Kanheri should be placed towards the beginning and the end, respectively, of this chronological spectrum (figs. 103, 107). In his book *Indian Architecture*, Brown (1940, 27) agreed in general with Burgess's views, but Brown added another important chronological factor. He argued that the *caityagṛha* form and ornamentation derive from wooden prototypes that obviously did not leave traces in the archaeological record. Therefore, he suggested that each *caitya* hall may be dated on the degree of its emancipation from original wooden models.

In recent years Vidya Dehejia is the only scholar who has attempted a comprehensive study of the early Buddhist rock-cut sites of the Deccan. In her book *Early Buddhist Rock Cut Temples* (Dehejia 1972), she carefully combines epigraphic and architectural evidence to map the architectural development of caves. She sees the Kondivte *caitya* hall as a direct descendant of Lomas Rishi cave and places it at the beginning of her chronological scheme, whereas Kanheri is positioned at the

to Nahapāna. Epigraphs referring to Sātavāhana rulers are also preserved in Nasik and Karli. Inscriptions 11a and 11b from Nasik mention Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi as well as regnal years 14 and 26; inscriptions 12, 13, 14, and 15 from Nasik mention Vāsiṣṭhīputra Puḷumāvi and the regnal years 2, 6, 5, and 19, while inscription 22 mentions Yajñasrī Śātakarṇi and the year 7; in Karli, Puḷumāvi is mentioned in inscriptions 21 (year 1) and 22 (year 24) and in an epigraph inscribed in the great *caitya* hall (Burgess 1883; reprint 1994a, 99–114). A Sātavāhana inscription (no. 16) from Kanheri cave 5 does not include any specific era (Gokhale 1991, 62).

opposite end of the spectrum (Dehejia 1972, table 11). Her sequencing of caves is slightly different from those outlined much earlier by Burgess and Brown. However, she agrees with their general time frame for Buddhist activity in the Western Ghats and links closely the flourishing of cave sites to the Sātavāhana power in the region. The same is true for Himanshu Ray, who, in her study *Monastery and Guild*, concurs with the general chronological parameters of activity suggested for the Buddhist caves in the western Deccan that begin with the excavations at Kondivte and end with those of Kanheri (Ray 1986, 61).

Where does Aurangabad fall in the main chronologies of the Buddhist caves of the western Deccan? Both James Burgess and Percy Brown in their monumental surveys ignore the Aurangabad *caitya* hall and focus only on the later caves at this site. Dehejia dedicates only a short paragraph to Aurangabad in her volume. She rightly notes the similarities between this ruined *caitya* and cave 9 at Ajanta (fig. 102) which she dates to the middle of the first century BCE. By extension, she also dates Aurangabad 4 to the same period and argues that the establishment of this cave together with that of the Nasik *caitya* hall and Budh Lena in Junnar took place before the excavations of the *caitya* halls at Bedsa (ca. 40 BCE), Karli (ca. 50 CE; fig. 106), and Kuda 9, which she dates to the very end of the first century CE (Dehejia 1972, 86–89). In the chronological model drawn by Dehejia, the remaining Junnar caves of Amba/Ambika, Bhima Shankar on Manmodi Hill, and Shivneri represent a late flourishing of Buddhist activities in the region, around the early part of the second century CE. The *caitya* hall at Kanheri marks the conclusion of the early phase of Buddhist excavations in the western Deccan as well as the decline of the Sātavāhana dynasty.

In his study *Late Hinayana Caves of Western India*, Dhavalikar links Aurangabad 4 (fig. 42) to Ajanta 9 (fig. 102) on the basis of their similar plans.[3] However, while agreeing with Dehejia on the date of Ajanta 9 (first century BCE), he proposes the first century CE for the date of Aurangabad 4. He bases his interpretation on the degree of emancipation from wooden prototypes that can be observed in these two *caitya* halls: Ajanta 9 has wooden beams inserted in the vault, whereas

[3] Dhavalikar (1984, 3) considers the rectangular plan of *caitya* halls as a late feature. Therefore, in his view *caityagṛhas* 1 and 6 at Kuda, having a quadrangular plan and flat roof, are the latest structures of the '*Hīnayāna*' phase.

Aurangabad 4 has stone ribs. In the Berkson volume on the Aurangabad caves, D. C. Bhattacarya also highlights the connections existing between Aurangabad 4 and Ajanta 9. However, he suggests a date of the second century BCE for the Aurangabad *caitya* without offering any explanation for his chronology (Berkson 1986, 43).

2.2 Methodological Problems in Dating the Early Caves in Western Deccan

In all the timelines formulated to date, the *caitya* halls of the western Deccan are sequenced like domino pieces on the bases of their inscriptions, ornamentations, ground plans, and presence of wooden architectural elements. For example, since early *caitya* halls tend to have plain pillars, such as the one at Bhaja (fig. 103), it is a general assumption that all apsidal caves with plain pillars must have been constructed earlier than those displaying pillars with carved bases and elaborate capitals. However, this kind of presupposition does not take into account regional developments or the possibility that old architectural formats were purposely revisited.

Similarly, if the inclusion of wooden elements in a *caitya* hall is indicative of an early date, then the more wooden architectural parts a cave includes, the earlier its date should be. In fact the *caityagṛha* at Bhaja, one of the earliest in the western Deccan, likely dating to the first century BCE, has wooden beams inserted in the rock ceiling and originally was equipped with a wooden facade. The dating criterion based on the assumption that rock-cut architecture in its first stages emulated wooden buildings is widely accepted, but it should be used with some caution. What if at some sites wooden architectural elements continued to be used through time to consciously evoke forms characteristic of earlier caves within the same region?

The possibility that phenomena such as regionalism and archaism could have impacted the art and architecture of the early caves (those generally labeled in the scholarship as *Hīnayāna* caves) has been completely overlooked. By regionalism, I mean the presence of trends in cave architecture that are region specific and do not occur everywhere in the western Deccan. By archaism I refer to the practice of consciously employing in new designs architectural forms that were outmoded or old-fashioned. In fact, we tend to assume that architects who worked on these caves constantly pushed to develop new forms, ignoring what

had been done at other nearby sites, with little or no reflection on past idioms. I believe that taking into account the location of the sites and the tendency to copy or revisit successful architectural models has the potential to provide a more accurate chronology. It is clear that these complexes did not grow in isolation, but rather developed in clusters where ideas and visual solutions were exchanged.

If we locate on a map the early rock-cut sites of Maharashtra, it is immediately apparent that Buddhist cave complexes were not evenly distributed across the region, but rather appear as cluster-forming micro-regional systems (fig. 2). This was a phenomenon common to other Buddhist monuments at the time. A great example is the famous establishment of Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh that experienced a tremendous growth between the first century BCE and the first century CE. Sanchi was part of a larger system of Buddhist centers, near the modern city of Vidisha, identified long ago by Alexander Cunningham (1854) as the Bhilsa Topes (fig. 101).[4] Located on top of hills and visible from each other, the Buddhist complexes of Sanchi, Sonari, Satdhara, Bhojpur, and Andher constituted a network of sites that relied on shared agricultural resources and possibly trade. Recent work by Julia Shaw has demonstrated how these complexes with *stūpas* and monasteries functioned together to define a Buddhist landscape rooted in the economy of the region. Focusing on the landscape, Shaw (2005) suggests that water management, dams, and land use were determining factors in the geographical alignment of these sites. In sum, Sanchi can no longer be understood as a single entity. In order to better comprehend the dynamics that led to the growth of this famous site, it is imperative to examine the whole Bhilsa system.

As we turn our attention to the Buddhist caves of the western Deccan, which are roughly contemporary with the Bhilsa Topes, it is important to keep this analytical model in mind. Rather than studying each cave site in isolation, we should single out spheres of interaction that shed light on the complex nature of the Buddhist landscape in the region. By re-connecting rock-cut monuments with the morphology of the Deccan landscape, it is possible to single out groups of sites that

[4] A somewhat similar system of sites, although on a smaller scale, can be seen at Pauni in Maharashtra, where several mounds have been noted in the surroundings of the major excavated *stūpa* (Deo and Joshi 1972, 5–8 and 23).

functioned together, formed systems characterized by similar visual idioms, and likely shared a common patronage base.

The more than 800 early Buddhist caves of the western Deccan have been generally treated in the scholarship as a homogeneous group, the product of a single cultural phenomenon localized within the large modern region of Maharashtra. Brown (1940, 25) defined the extension of the area occupied by the caves: 'Taking Nasik as the center, they are all situated within a circle having a radius of less than two hundred miles'. If we shift our attention to the distribution of sites in relation to the topography of the plateau, this overly general and abstract macro-regional model falls apart. The topography of the landscape where the phenomenon of the Buddhist rock-cut caves took over is not at all uniform: it includes coastal areas, mountain passes, and the upper plateau lands that in antiquity must have had different socioeconomic systems (Fig. 2).

The coastal area known as Konkan is about 720 kilometres long and extends southward from the mouths of the rivers Narmada and Tapi. It consists of a narrow, fertile strip of land 40 to 60 kilometres wide, between the Indian Ocean and the Sahyadri range. While agriculture was also practiced in the region, the major revenue source in Konkan was certainly trade: Bharuch, Surat, Sopara, Kalyan, and Chaul were some of the most important ports historically involved in long-distance Indian Ocean trade. The Sahyadri mountain range that runs north-south, reaching at a few points 1200 metres in altitude, marks the edge of the Deccan Plateau. Offshoots of the Sahyadri extend inland on the plateau, creating east-west massifs such as the Satmala Hills and the Ajanta range, the Hariscandra and Bhalghat ranges, and the Mahadev range to the south. Several passes connect the inner parts of the Deccan, covered by basaltic rock, to the coastal region: most important are the Thal, Nana, and Bhor Ghats leading into central Konkan. It was mostly around passes that hill settlements were established in antiquity to take economic advantage of the trade going through the Ghats. Some of these establishments may have also functioned as outposts for the exploitation of the agricultural land of the plateau (Morrison 1995, 217–218). Agriculture was certainly the major resource of the upper lands, however networks of urban sites and trade routes existed in antiquity, linking the western Deccan to Andhra Pradesh, southern Gujarat, and western Madhya Pradesh. This network extended through the river valleys of the tributaries of the Krishna and Godavari, as well as the Narmada, and followed the pro-

files of smaller massifs such as the Ajanta range to the north. Within this vast and diverse geographic and economic landscape, Buddhist sites located near each other would naturally form closer relationships. Aurangabad, Ajanta, and Pitalkhora located up on the plateau on different slopes of the same Ajanta range surely grew through time as a loosely bound unit.

2.3 Defining Micro-Regions: The Relevance of Physical and Cultural Geography

The Buddhist caves of the western Deccan are noticeably clustered in three distinct environmental regions within the modern state of Maharashtra (fig. 2): the coastal belt by the Indian Ocean, the mountainous passes or Ghats leading onto the plateau, and the upper plateau areas.[5] Each of these areas was characterized by specific economic structures; therefore, it is likely that caves located within each of these areas shared similar patronage bases. For example, it is reasonable to assume that cave sites like Kuda and Kanheri located in the coastal region, although established at slightly different times, were all sustained by the mercantile economy of the local ports. Above the coastal clusters, cave complexes such as the Junnar group adjacent to key passes must have been financially supported by the transit of people and trade goods, and only in part by the exploitation of rural activities. On the other hand, caves such as those of Aurangabad, Ajanta and Pitalkhora, located on the upper plateau, must have relied on commercial activities linked to inland urban centers and also on agricultural activities.

Many early rock-cut Buddhist complexes in Maharashtra have dedicatory inscriptions engraved on their walls, pillars, or facades. These formulaic inscriptions, generally written in Brāhmī characters and Prakrit or a local hybrid language (Salomon 1998, 144), list the names of patrons, the item donated, and the reason for the gift. Some of them also include the profession and provenance of the donor as well as the names of the beneficiaries of the gift. In a few rare and valuable instances, a date is indicated at the beginning of the epigraph (Salomon 1998, 118). A survey of inscriptions recording the donor's provenance is helpful for reconstructing the patronage catchment area

[5] Morrison (1995, 215) noted the existence of two clusters of cave sites around the passes of Nana Ghat and Bhor Ghat.

for each site and the degree of interaction existing in antiquity among centers located in different geographic zones.

An excellent example is the important coastal cave complex at Kanheri. This site is a good case study because it has the largest numbers of dedicatory Buddhist inscriptions recovered in any of the western Deccan cave sites, spanning the second to the ninth centuries CE.[6] Most of the patrons of the earliest epigraphs identified themselves as residents of the nearby port town of Kalyan.[7] This city, located on the estuary of the river Ulha and now part of the greater Mumbai metropolitan area, was one of the most important ports on the Konkan coast; it is mentioned in a variety of textual and epigraphic sources that date to between the first and sixth centuries CE (Hebalkar 2001, 109). A few more donors of the early caves at Kanheri appear to come from the nearby harbor city of Sopara (Gokhale 1991, 155),[8] located in the modern Thane district. Sopara was another main port mentioned in ancient Buddhist and Jain literature (Hebalkar 2001, 113). The eighth edict of the third century BCE Mauryan king Aśoka was inscribed in Sopara, and this city continued to be a key trade center in the first century CE, when it was listed in a Hellenistic trade manual known as the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*. Only a couple of early inscriptions at Kanheri mention donors from more distant areas: there is one reference to Nasik, located by the Thal Ghat (Ghokale 1991, 155),[9] and one to a mysterious place called Rajatalaka near the city of Paithan located on the upper plateau by the southern edge of the Ajanta range.[10] This epigraphic evidence indicates that most of the patrons of the early caves at Kanheri came from the coastal area and that donors from inland areas were rare at this major site. Therefore, we can securely

[6] A total of 58 inscriptions have been discovered at Kanheri, in addition to the so-called epitaphs that have been dated by Shobhana Gokhale to the sixth century CE. Of these 58 inscriptions, 42 can be attributed to the early phase of the site, between the second and third centuries CE. The early epigraphs are in Prakrit and are inscribed in Brāhmī characters. In Kanheri cave 90 three Pahlavi epigraphs dating to the 11th century have been found, however they do not refer to any Buddhist donation (Gokhale 1991).

[7] Kalyan is mentioned in inscriptions 3, 4, 6, 20, 25, 28, 29, 38, 40, 43, 50, 54, and 55.

[8] Sopara is mentioned in inscriptions 6, 17, 24, 32, and 46.

[9] Nasik is mentioned in inscription 2.

[10] Gokhale (1991, 52, inscription 6) has suggested the identification of Rajatalaka with Aurangabad.

conclude that this site relied mostly on local patronage and that its economic base was predominantly founded on maritime trade.

The caves established near the Ghats connecting the coast to the interior of the Deccan Plateau provide a different scenario. Centers like Junnar, near Nana Ghat, or Bhaja, Bedsa, Shelarvadi, and Karli, close to Bhor Ghat, seem to have drawn patrons not only locally, but also from the coastal area and the inner regions of the plateau (Morrison 1995, 216). For example, at Junnar two inscriptions mention donors from Kalyan; one lists donors from Bharukachha, the city port of Barygaza (modern Bharuch) mentioned in the *Periplus*; one cites a donor from Dhenukakata, a city identified with modern Dharanikota, in the vicinity of Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh; and one mentions a foreigner from the 'Gata' country. At Karli five inscriptions cite donors from Dhenukakata and two mention donors from the Konkan port of Sopara (Burgess and Indraji 1881; reprint 1976, 27–37 and 41–55).

The scenario of caves located in the upper region of the Deccan Plateau seems surprisingly similar to that in the coastal region. In the upper region, the catchment area of the Buddhist caves is confined mostly to local patrons from the interior parts of the plateau. Although less epigraphic evidence is available, two inscriptions from the site of Pitalkhora mention the town of Paithan, the prosperous capital of the Sātavāhana kingdom. This city was located on the southern edge of the same larger mountain range where Pitalkhora was excavated. The remaining votive inscriptions from this cave site, as well as those from early Ajanta, do not mention the donors' provenance, suggesting an *argumentum e silentio*. Perhaps the donors did not choose to list their places of origin because they were local residents and therefore felt no need to incorporate such information.

This evidence strongly suggests that each cave site operated within a well-defined catchment area. The picture that emerges is one of a world in which several systems coexisted and functioned parallel to each other. Furthermore, within each geographic zone—the coast, the passes, and the upper plateau—several concentrations of sites are noticeable: cave complexes were obviously clustered in key places where good rock surfaces were available and solid patronage was guaranteed. In the coastal region are two main clusters of cave sites: the caves of Kanheri and Kondivte close to the coast and those of Ambivali and Kondane at the edge of the Sahyadri, around the ports of Sopara and Kalyan in central Konkan; and those of Nadsur, Kuda and Kol, and Mahad in the south near the port of Chaul.

Larger sites blossomed around the passes leading from the coast to the plateau, where there was plenty of basaltic rock available to be excavated and patronage was physically channeled through breaks in the plateau's mountainous edge. To the northwest of the port city of Kalyan, up on the plateau by the river Godavari near Thal Ghat is the major site of Nasik. Farther south, next to Nana Ghat, are several groups of caves clustered around the modern village of Junnar, which include the Buddhist sites of Manmodi, Shivneri and Lenyadri, and Tulja Lena. Leading to the port of Chaul is the pass of Bhor Ghat, where Bhaja, Bedsa, Selarvadi, and Karli are located. On the upper parts of the plateau, most of the early Buddhist caves located inland are grouped around the Ajanta range, which is a westward outcrop of the Sahyadri mountains. Pitalkhora is carved on the west spur of the range, Ajanta on the northern slopes, and the Aurangabad caves on the southern face of the massif (Fig. 3).

2.4 Regional Trends in Cave Architecture

Rock-cut sites within the same cluster certainly did entertain some forms of exchange. Therefore many architectural characteristics traditionally attributed to chronological factors might be the result of fertile contacts within a particular cluster of sites or within a larger regional system. Dehejia (1972, 79), discussing the diachronic development of *caitya* facades, remarked that some architectural traits were localized to particular sites and could not be used as universal chronological indicators. She presented the case of the 'appearance of the 'blind' *caitya* windows on the facade of some caves' and noted that 'three such windows are known and all three occur among the many cave sites at Junnar' (Dehejia 1972, 79). However, at the time she did not discuss the existence of regionalism in rock-cut architecture.

Regional trends can, in fact, explain some of the apparent idiosyncratic characteristics that emerge in many of the postulated chronologies. For example, it is generally understood that simple, plain octagonal pillars in *caityagṛha* caves are indicators of the early date of the structures (generally BCE). While this is true in the case of the *caitya* halls at Bhaja and Pitalkhora 3 (figs. 103, 105), where inscriptions corroborate the early date of the structures, it is not the rule at all the sites. How are we to explain the presence of plain octagonal pillar in *caityas* like cave 4 at Aurangabad, which was established at a

much later time? In fact, all the *caityagṛhas* on the upper plateau, such as Ajanta 9 and 10 (figs. 102, 104) and Aurangabad 4 (fig. 42), seem to follow the blueprint established in the early *caitya* 3 at Pitalkhora (fig. 105). With time, several modifications were introduced, such as the square plan at Ajanta 9 and Aurangabad 4 or the stone ceiling beams at Aurangabad 4. Yet the pillars continued to be carved as slender, plain polygonal shafts without sculpted base or capital, apparently copying or referencing the same majestic simplicity of the early *caitya* cave 3 at Pitalkhora. It is my opinion that the sustained use of plain pillars only at sites located on the upper plateau represents a classic example of regionalism in cave architecture.

Why only in this area do we notice a prolonged use of plain pillars? I suggest that these pillars were left plain because they were originally covered with paintings, and that the practice of decorating *caityagṛhas* with wall paintings was especially strong in this inner region, as confirmed by the surviving paintings from Ajanta cave 10. This regional trait continued through time, certainly up to the fifth century CE, when the painted decoration of the Ajanta caves, still surviving today, was heavily emphasized.[11]

In contrast, the *caitya* halls located near the coast or on the Ghats do not share the same trends. For example, in the cluster of caves excavated near Bhor Ghat, which include Bhaja, Kondane, and Karli, plain pillars were employed only in the early *caityas* of Bhaja and Kondane, which date to the second and first centuries BCE. In the later *caitya* of Karli, dated to the first century CE, the pillars are both solid and elaborate with pot-shaped bases and fancy sculpted capitals (fig. 106). Clearly the regional trend seen on the plateau was not relevant in centers located by the coast or on the passes. These observations should encourage more caution when using architectural elements mechanically extrapolated from their local contexts as chronological indicators. Regional trends and spheres of interaction are clearly important for unlocking the phenomenon of early Buddhist caves in the western Deccan.

[11] The fifth century CE Buddhist caves at Bagh in Madhya Pradesh were also covered with paintings. Traces of paintings also survive in cave 3 at Aurangabad, which is related to the last phase of activity at Ajanta.

2.5 Archaism

Archaism, or the conscious re-use in *caitya* architecture of outmoded or old-fashioned elements, is a trend closely related to regionalism which has also been overlooked in the scholarship. When discussing the architectural idiom used by the sculptors of the early Buddhist caves of the Deccan, one tends to imagine a tradition in perennial progression aimed at emancipation from the conventions of standing wooden architecture. However, during this long process there might have been some points of reflection. Especially with architecture, once a tradition is firmly entrenched, there is always a tendency to revisit and re-contextualize old forms that established the roots of the tradition.

There are instances in which architectural elements used in early caves were consciously replicated at later times, perhaps in an effort to establish ties with a pre-existing tradition. Such phenomena would occur especially within cave complexes in expansion, where a second or third *caitya* hall was built near the initial, pre-existing one. Rather than simply juxtaposing the old with the new, architects might have chosen to incorporate some traditional elements to underline the continuity existing between the past and the present.

The site of Ajanta, high on the plateau, is a good example of what can be called 'archaism' in cave architecture. At Ajanta there are only five caves that date to the early period of activity, the so-called *Hīnayāna* phase: caves 9 and 10 are *caitya* halls (figs. 102, 104) and caves 12, 13 and 15A are *vihāras*.[12] The *caitya* halls located next to each other differ: cave 9 is a smaller hall with a square plan and a stone facade, while cave 10 is a large unit that originally included a wooden façade. Both caves originally had wooden beams attached to the vaults of the stone pillared halls. Scholars seem to concur that Ajanta 10 was the earliest cave at the site during the first century BCE and that Ajanta 9 was carved right next to it at a later time, perhaps a century later.[13]

[12] Cave 15A has been recently discovered: it consists of a very small *vihāra* with only 3 cells (Spink 2007, 178). Cave 11, although wedged between the *caitya* cave 10 and the *vihāra* cave 12 is a later fifth century CE unit (Spink 2007, 141).

[13] While there is agreement on the sequence in which Ajanta caves 9 and 10 were excavated, there are divergences on the specific dates of these two *caityas*. Dehejia (1972, 157) maintains that cave 9 should be dated to the first century BCE, i.e. 70–50 BCE or slightly thereafter. Spink (2007, 131), on the other hand, suggests that cave 9 was completed in the first century CE, at least a century after cave 10 was established.

Regardless of what the date of Ajanta cave 9 may be, it is remarkable that the architects who designed the later cave decided to adopt innovative architectural solutions such as a square plan and a stone façade, yet continued to follow the tradition of attaching wooden beams to the vault of the *caitya*. This is the only cave in the western Deccan that combines such features, thus raising an important question: Why make a monumental stone façade that diverges from the practice of using wooden elements in rock-cut architecture, and then continue to attach wood to the ceiling of the cave? The only logical explanation is that in Ajanta cave 9 we are confronted with a classic case of archaism—an explicit desire to allude to the earliest forms of the tradition while radically transforming the layout of the cave and introducing an elaborate stone façade. It seems clear that the wooden beams of cave 9 were conventionally used to establish a link between the new cave and the old one adjacent to it.

This suggests that the degree of emancipation of rock architecture from wood prototypes cannot always function as an absolute chronological parameter. It is important to examine the specific site context before using this criterion to establish elaborate chronologies. A dating system based solely on prefabricated schemes applied to architectural development can be misleading because it categorically excludes the possibility that a conscious revival of archaic forms might have taken place in the rock-cut architectural tradition.

2.6 The Ajanta Cluster in the Upper Plateau Region: Locating the Aurangabad *Caitya*

The Aurangabad complex, together with Ajanta and Pitalkhora, formed a well-defined cluster of cave sites excavated on different sides of the Ajanta range located at the crossroads of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh (fig. 1). This geological formation, almost a western extension of the Sahyadri range and adjacent to the Satmala hills, runs parallel to the Tapi river and to the Satpura mountains located to the north of the Tapi. The Ajanta range also marks the watershed between the hydrographic basins of the rivers Tapi to the north and Godavari

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Burgess, in 1880, was the only one to consider cave 9 as the earliest of the Ajanta group (Burgess and Fergusson 1880; reprint 1988, 289).

to the south and constitutes the northernmost outpost of the Deccan Plateau.

The caves at Aurangabad were excavated on the southern edge of the Ajanta range, towards the Godavari plain (fig. 2). On the northern and western slopes of the same mountain formation are the sites of Ajanta and Pitalkhora, which, along with Aurangabad, are referred to herein as 'the Ajanta cluster'. This is the only group of caves that was established around the beginning of the Common Era at some distance from the Ghats, where most of the Buddhist rock-cutting activity took place. In light of the relatively insular location of the Ajanta cluster, it is likely that cave sites in this particular group were developed in close contact with each other and possibly shared distinctive features through time. Therefore, it may be helpful to look to Pitalkhora and Ajanta if we are to understand the fragmentary remains of the earliest phase of activity at Aurangabad.

The process of establishing an absolute chronological horizon for early Aurangabad is particularly difficult. Architectural analysis is the only tool that can be employed, given the absence of inscriptions at this site. Unfortunately, very few architectural elements survive in cave 4: the facade of the *caitya* is missing, and only part of the hall survives, a section of the vault, one pillar, and most of the central *stūpa*. While these elements are insufficient *per se* to provide a tentative date for the Aurangabad *caitya*, they are enough to point to the close links existing between this cave and Ajanta cave 9. Such connections have been the foundations for all the chronologies of Aurangabad formulated until now. The two *caitya* halls, Aurangabad 4 (fig. 42) and Ajanta 9 (fig. 102), are indeed quite similar: they are rather small caves with a rectangular ground plan, plain pillars describing the apsidal area, and a deep barrel vault with flat ceilings over the side aisles. In cave 9 at Ajanta wooden beams were inserted in the vault to simulate the effect of freestanding wooden architecture, while in Aurangabad cave 4 stone beams were carved from the rock itself.

The articulation of the interior space in the *caitya* hall 4 at Aurangabad is also comparable to that of Ajanta cave 9. In both caves, pillars do not directly support the vault but are connected to a frieze underneath it. In Aurangabad this frieze is decorated with a series of small *caitya* windows on a continuous *vedikā*, below which are alternatively positioned stepped lintels and rectangles (fig. 43). This decoration, which is the only ornamental element extant from the early phase at Aurangabad, elaborates upon a visual syntax ubiquitous in

the western Deccan. Blind *caitya* windows, stepped lintels, and *vedikā*s always appear in different combinations on the façades of *caitya* halls.[14] They make loose reference to real windows and balconies on actual buildings and ostensibly recreate elaborate palaces in this austere mountain setting.[15]

At Aurangabad, however, blind *caitya* windows and *vedikā*s are reduced to patterns decorating the interior of the *caitya*. Devoid of any architectural suggestion, they were brought inside the cave and turned into pure signs, formulating a new ornamental language. What can be inferred from this transformation and re-contextualization of architectural elements in the *caitya* cave 4 at Aurangabad? If we agree that façades of rock-cut *caityas* originally imitated freestanding wooden palaces with windows and railings, then by the time the *caitya* at Aurangabad was carved, the relationship between freestanding and rock-cut architecture was clearly severed. The windows and balconies were no longer used in reference to actual building façades but were used simply as patterns in a part of the cave where in theory they did not belong. The transformation of windows and railings into patterns decorating the interior of the Aurangabad *caitya* 4 can only be the product of a consolidated rock-cut architectural tradition that, having diverged from its original models, is reflecting upon itself.[16] All of this seems to confirm the general idea that the *caitya* hall at Aurangabad was carved after Ajanta cave 9.

Plain octagonal pillars demarcate the interior apsidal space of the *caitya* hall at Aurangabad. If one follows traditional dating methodologies according to which plain pillars were used mostly in 'early' caves completed before the Common Era, then establishing a date for the Aurangabad *caitya* hall becomes especially problematic, because architectural features normally considered 'early' (plain pillars) and 'late' (elaborately decorated stone vaults') coexist. In fact, as mentioned

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[14] Variations on the ornamental motifs seen on the vault of Aurangabad cave 4 can be noted on the façade at Ajanta cave 9, where in the upper section there is a staggered row of six ornamental *caitya* windows, the two larger ones alternating with the four smaller ones.

[15] An inscription on the ceiling of cave 12 at Bhaja explicitly identifies the *caitya* hall as being a *pāsāda*, a palace (Nagaraju 1981, 329, no. 3).

[16] It can be argued that *caitya* windows and *vedikā*s also appear as ornamental motifs inside the main hall of rock-cut viharas such as Ajanta 12. However, it should be remembered that in the case of residential *vihāras* each cell represents the inside of the cave while the main square hall onto which the cells open should be considered as outside space equal in function to the courtyard of a building.

previously, we are faced with a classic example of regional use of archaism in cave architecture. Plain octagonal pillars devoid of sculptural decoration appear to be a feature characteristic of all of the *caitya* halls excavated on the slopes of the Ajanta range. Pitalkhora 3 (fig. 105) and 13, Ajanta 9 and 10 (figs. 102, 104), and Aurangabad 4 (fig. 42) all share this feature, regardless of their different dates, thus confirming that only by looking at the larger picture is it possible to get a better understanding of the features of each site. Therefore, the dating of the *caitya* hall at Aurangabad cannot be based only on the shape of the pillars or the decoration of the vault. It is imperative to consider the whole combination of features and to look beyond Aurangabad at other sites on the same range to understand its place in the Buddhist rock-cut tradition of the western Deccan.

2.7 The *Stūpa*

The *stūpa* carved in the Aurangabad *caitya* hall (cave 4, fig. 42) is one of the few surviving architectural elements that can be linked to the phase of founding of the site. This solid rock-cut structure, once damaged and now conserved, still displays its original form, with a high plinth and a bulging dome. Given the lack of chronological anchors at Aurangabad, one wonders whether the morphology of this small *in situ* structure might be indicative of the date of the cave. Dehejia has warned about the difficulties of using rock-cut *stūpas* as chronological indicators for early *caityas* in the western Deccan. She argues that the 'absence of concomitances' does not permit such an approach, and says that there seems to be no consistency among the proportions of *stūpas*, the presence of a single or double base, the types of *harmikās*, and the use of decorative elements at different cave sites (Dehejia 1972, 76). However it becomes immediately apparent that the different elements she lists as being so variable are just 'accessories' to the monument. The defining element of a *stūpa* is actually its dome. If the *stūpa* is essentially its dome, then it is on this particular architectural element that one should focus. Cunningham (1854, 178) had noted that *stūpas* tended to acquire a prominent bulbous shape over the centuries, and mapping the relative form of the *stūpa* carved in *caitya* cave 4 at Aurangabad may be helpful for locating the early site in a wider chronological horizon.

The bulging dome of the rock-cut *stūpa* in Aurangabad cave 4 is very different from the traditional hemispherical relic structures built

in northern India around the beginning of the current era (first century BCE to first to second century CE). The Buddhist sites established in the Vidisha area of Madhya Pradesh all display a hemispherical *aṇḍa* (Willis 2000), and the *stūpas* depicted on the *vedikā*s of Bharhut, Sanchi *stūpas* 2 and 1, and Pauni all conform to this type.[17] Only a handful of rock-cut *stūpa*s in early *caitya* halls follow the Aurangabad 4 bulbous dome type: *stūpa*s with bulging domes are found in cave 9 at Ajanta, as well as in Junnar, in the *caitya* hall 40 of the Budh Lena group and in the 'isolated *caitya*', both unfinished caves, and in Kuda cave 1. Hence the diffusion of this particular *stūpa* form seems not to be linked to regional trends but rather to chronological factors. Most of the caves listed above reflect a phase of maturity in the rock-cut tradition of the western Deccan and were established after the beginning of the Common Era.[18] The rock lends itself well to the shaping of *stūpas* with globular domes: it is certainly easier to carve a bulging dome out of solid rock than to build it with stone slabs or rectangular bricks. Therefore, the bulging *aṇḍa* may well have developed within the rock-cut tradition.

The *stūpas* with bulging domes in caves Ajanta 9 (fig. 102) and Aurangabad 4 (fig. 42) may have functioned as models for the elaborate monuments created centuries later in Ajanta caves 19 and 26 (figs. 109, 126) and Ellora cave 10, during a period when Buddha images dominated the artistic tradition. *Stūpas* like that in Aurangabad cave 4 are commonly depicted in the fifth century CE paintings at Ajanta and in the votive carvings at Kanheri.[19] Only later, around the eighth century, did they seem to emerge in the northern Buddhist tradition.

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[17] See for example a scene representing *stūpa* worship on the so-called Prasenajit pillar, the corner pillar from the Bharhut *vedikā* (Cunningham 1879, pl. XIII). At Sanchi 2 the only *stūpa* represented appears on a corner pillar placed at the south entrance of the enclosure. See Marshall and Foucher (1940; reprint 1983, vol. 3, pl. 83, no. 44 C). Several images of *stūpas* appear on gate cross-beams and corner pillars at Sanci 1 (Ibid., vol. 2, pls. 2, 11,12, 15, 22, 60, 63). At Pauni in Maharashtra *stūpa*s with perfect hemispherical domes are depicted on two surviving pillars of the outer railing (Deo and Joshi 1972, pls. XIX and XXIII).

[18] There is not universal agreement on the chronology of these caves. However, most of the scholars seem to agree that the Budh Lena, Amba Ambika, Shivneri, and Ganesha Lena groups in Junnar date to different times in the first century CE. Ajanta cave 9 is generally dated to the end of the first century BCE; however, I believe that a first century CE date seems more appropriate. For the chronology of these caves see Dehejia (1972) and Dhavalikar (1984).

[19] Franz (1980, 41) labels the *stūpa* with globular dome as 'Kugelkuppel' and sees it as a development typical of the rock-cut Deccan Plateau sites up to the sixth century CE.

The *Kriyāsaṃgraha*, a key text on *stūpa* architecture redacted in the eight century by Kuladatta, lists the bulging *stūpa* type as being one of the main forms of the monument.[20] In the eighth chapter (*prakaraṇa*) of this text, four different *stūpa* types are codified according to their dome shape: the *gaṇḍākṛti* (bulblike) *stūpa*, which is the one more closely related to the Aurangabad 4 *stūpa*; the *dhānyākṛti* (shape of a mound of grain); the *pātrakṛti* (shape of an alms bowl); and *kalaśākṛti* (shape of a vase) *stūpas* (Bénisti 1960, 104–105). The proportions of each architectural component are given in detail for each *stūpa* type, and the architectural modules are symbolically associated with Buddhist virtues. According to this text, the total height of each *stūpa* type should be the same: in the bulbous *stūpa (gaṇḍākṛti)* the dome is obviously taller than the base, giving this particular *stūpa* a distinctive slender look (Ibid., 105). In discussing the architectural components of each *stūpa*, the author of the eighth chapter of the *Kriyāsaṃgraha* always uses the Sanskrit word *kumbha* (pot) for 'dome' (Ibid., 98).[21] The word *aṇḍa* (egg) is instead more commonly used in earlier texts (Ibid., 97).[22] The development of a new vocabulary might reflect the culmination of a trend in *stūpa* architecture: by this time early hemispherical domes had given way to bulging superstructures visually recalling upside-down vases.[23] The rock-cut *stūpa* carved in cave 4 at Aurangabad seems to be the prototype marking the starting point of this process. These observations on the shape of the *stūpa* in the *caitya* 4 at Aurangabad, if considered along with the other salient architectural features in this cave, suggest at least a date at the end of the first century CE for the first phase of occupation at Aurangabad.

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[20] Passages from the Nepalese version of this manuscript are translated in Bénisti (1960, 90–107).

[21] In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* the dome of the *stūpa* is usually referred to as a vessel (Roth 1980, 183–184). The similarity of the *stūpa* dome to a vessel is also apparent in the legend on the creation of the first *stūpa* referred to by the Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang, in which the dome is interpreted as a replica of Śākyamuni's alms bowl (*pātra)* placed upside-down (Bénisti 1960, 43).

[22] Bénisti cites as an example the *Divyāvadāna*. This Buddhist Sanskrit text is the only one to discuss the details of *stūpa* architecture before the much later *Kriyāsaṃgraha* (Ibid., 89).

[23] Great examples are the bulging *stūpa* domes in both north and south India appearing in miniature bronze *stūpas* from Kurkihar and Nagapattinam (Mitra 1980, 30, figs. 42–43).

2.8 Relics in Rock-cut *Stūpas: Caityas* vs. *Stūpas*

The *stūpa* or dome-shaped Buddhist monument is generally understood as a vessel for sacred relics.[24] Such dome-shaped monuments in early Buddhist caves are mostly found in apsidal *caitya* halls like Aurangabad cave 4. They also occasionally appear in small caves often adjacent to *caitya* halls, as in the case of the Kanheri *caitya*, which is flanked by such structures (figs. 107, 108), or clustered together as a group at the margins of sites, as at Bhaja, Bedsa, and Kanheri. Local Buddhist devotees clearly differentiated between *stūpas* erected in apsidal pillared caves likely destined for public worship and those that were not. Cave inscriptions use the word *caitya* when referring to dome-shaped monuments placed in major pillared halls[25] while the word *stūpa* is employed to designate the dome-shaped structures built in small secondary units or clustered together at the margins of sites.[26] Worthy of note is the fact that epigraphs referring to *caityas* placed in major apsidal halls are never inscribed on the actual dome-shaped monument but rather on other parts of the cave such as pillars or walls. This is not the case for secondary *stūpas* placed in subsidiary positions where the epigraphs are often carved directly on the body of the *stūpa.* This may be a further indication that such dome-shaped structures in the western Deccan, although all identical in shape, may have been conceptually different: the *caitya* perhaps denoting a sacredness not to be debased by votive inscription.

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[24] A review of previous interpretations dedicated to the symbolism of the *stūpa* can be found in Fussman (1986, 37–53).

[25] The actual term used in the inscriptions of the western Deccan is *cetiyaghara (caityagṛha* in Sanskrit), meaning hall receptacle of the *cetiya* or *caitya*.

[26] This is clearly visible at Kanheri where the word *caityagṛha* appears in inscriptions nos. 5 and 6 in cave 3, the *caitya* hall, while the word *stūpa* appears in inscription no. 14 incised on the top part of a secondary *stūpa* placed in cave 4, a small circular chamber just to the left of *caitya* hall 3 (Gokhale 1991, 51, 52, and 62). At Bhaja, inscriptions nos. 3, and 4 on secondary *stūpas* identify each of the monuments as being a *thūpo*, the Prakrit equivalent of *stūpa* (Burgess and Indraji 1881; reprint 1976, 24–25). At Bedsa, a secondary *stūpa* is also identified as *thūpo* in inscription no. 1 (Ibid., 26). On the other hand the word *caitya* (Prakrit *cetiya*) as part of the compound *caityagṛha* (Prakrit *cetiyaghara*) is found at Junnar in inscription no. 3 from the Shivneri square *caitya* hall 48 (Ibid., 42), in inscriptions nos. 29 and 30 from the Lenyadri square *caitya* hall 15 (Ibid., 53), and in inscription no. 34 from *caitya* hall 1 at Shivneri (Ibid., 55). At Kuda the word *cetiyaghara* is recorded in inscription no. 15. At Mahad the term *cetiyaghara* is recorded in inscription no. 1, while the compound *cetiyakoḍhi* appears in inscription no. 2 (Mallebrein 1986, 53 and 145).

Schopen has suggested that secondary *stūpas* found at many rock-cut sites in the western Deccan are specifically related to the cult of the monastic dead, but has offered no interpretation on the role played by *caityas* in apsidal halls (Schopen 1997, 174).[27] No difference appears in most of the Sanskrit Buddhist texts between the words *caitya* and *stūpa*, which are mostly used as synonyms.[28] In the Pāli *vinaya*, however, the word *stūpa* appears, surprisingly, to be absent: *cetiya* is the sole term used to designate Buddhist monuments, with the exception of two passages that, according to Schopen (1997, 96), remain remarkably ambiguous.[29] Schopen takes this evidence as an indication that in Sri Lanka there was a reticence about the erection of *stūpas* commemorating monastic dead (Schopen 1997, 96, note 19). While not explicitly commenting on the conceptual distinction between *caitya* and *stūpa*, Schopen implies that the term *stūpa* was essentially used to designate mounds established for the cult of deceased monks and not those created as foci of public devotion. This kind of scenario is the one we observe in the early caves of the western Deccan, where the word *stūpa* in inscriptions is exclusively used in the context of secondary dome-shaped monuments linked to monastic dead, while the term *caitya* always designated *stūpa*-shaped monuments in main pillared apsidal halls.

The meaning and usage of the word *caitya* are by no means clear and have long been subjects of discussion.[30] In the pre-Buddhist tradition the term *caitya* seems to have referred to holy trees or nat-

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[27] The tradition of erecting *stūpa*s for monastic dead continued well into the sixth century CE, as demonstrated by the existence of a late burial gallery in Kanheri (cave 81) with related epitaphs (Gokhale 1991, 109–136).

[28] One notable exception is a passage of the *Divyāvadāna* discussing the building of a *stūpa* for the Buddha Kṣemaṅkara (Bénisti 1960, 74–75). No distinction is made between *stūpa* and *caitya* also in the later *Caityavinayodbhāva sūtra* translated by Tucci (1932). Roth (1980, 183–207) briefly addressed this issue.

[29] The word *stūpa*, however, appears in chronicles such as the Mahāvaṃsa and the Thūpavaṃsa. In the *Dhammapadāṭṭhakathā*, *caityas* are classified into *śarīrakacetiya* (*caitya* with bodily relics), *pāribhogacetiya* (*caitya* such as the bodhi tree shrine), and *uddesikacetiya* (shrines that are reminders, not anchored to any particular Buddha's life event or bodily remains) (Burlingame 1921, 3.96; see also Strong 2004, 19).

[30] On the etymology and early use of these two words see Goswamy (1980, 1–9). An insightful discussion of these two terms can be found in Trainor (1997, 35–39). The first occurrence of the word *stūpa* in a Buddhist sense is found in the Aśokan pillar edict of Nigali Sagar in Terai, where the king states that he has enlarged the *stūpa* of the Buddha Konākamana (Kanyakamuni) (Bénisti 1960, 47); see also Hultzsch (1950, 165).

ural spots favored by itinerant ascetics (Trainor 1997, 34).[31] Bénisti (1960, 47–48) explains that in the Buddhist tradition the word *caitya* has a wide range of usages. It does not necessarily refer to a tumulus (*stūpa*), and it can indicate a sacred spot, a shrine, or a building. On the explanatory labels on the *vedikā* reliefs from the Bharhut *stūpa*, the term is often linked to depictions of sacred trees under which sit thrones that are being venerated.[32] In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* as well as in all of the versions of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* the term *caitya* is associated with the four key sites of the Buddha's life worthy of pilgrimage and worship: the locations of his birth, enlightenment, first sermon, and death where at some point commemorative *stūpa* mounds were erected by devotees (Bareau 1962, 240–41).

Therefore, *caityas* and *stūpas*, although related categories in the Buddhist tradition, are not always interchangeable. In the *Bodhisattvabhūmī* a clear distinction is made between *pūjā* performed to a *caitya* and that performed to a *stūpa* (Vallée Poussin 1937, 28). But most explicit of all is the *Mahāsāṃghika vinaya*, where it is explained that a *stūpa* contains relics while a *caitya* does not (Bareau 1962, 240).[33] The picture that emerges from this *vinaya* seems to be somewhat in line with the evidence from the early rock-cut sites of the western Deccan. Relic deposits, whenever found, as in Pitalkhora, were not actually located in the core of *stūpa*-shaped monuments placed in pillared *caitya* halls.[34] These rock-cut domed structures have only a shallow recess cut at the top for the placement of the *cāttravalī*. They do not have sockets carved deeper in the dome suitable for the deposition of relics. Of course it is possible that relics were placed in the low recess below the *cāttravalī* when the cave entered into use. However, it is remarkable that relic finds or inscriptional references to relics in the western Deccan caves do not point to *stūpa* domes in *caitya* halls as being ideal locations for relics. It seems, therefore, that in the early

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31 B. C. Law observes that in the Pāli *Saṃyutta Nikāya* the word *cetiya* often refers to sacred places similar to *vihāras* where the religious practitioners could reside (Law 1931, 45).

32 Two inscriptions on the coping of the Bharhut *stūpa* label a tree with a throne as a *caitya* (Cunningham 1879, reprint 1998, 130, no. 4 and pl. XLVIII, no. 6; 131, no. 10 and pl. XLIII, no. 4). Bareau (1974, 16–17) has discussed links between sacred trees and *cetiyas*.

33 Roth (1980, 195) briefly addresses this issue. See also Vallée Poussin (1937, 284).

34 Relics were most often placed in the outside drum of rock-cut dome-shaped monuments in *caitya* caves or in the pillars; they were secured with plugs.

caves of the western Deccan relics were not key components of *caitya* worship where the sacredness of a *caitya* did not rely necessarily on the presence of a primary relic in the dome from the time of first use of the cave. Relics may have been donated consequently to *caityas* still actively in worship.

The most interesting relic discovery in the western Deccan comes from the site of Pitalkhora on the western spur of the Ajanta range. When in 1953 the Pitalkhora caves came under the auspices of the Archaeological Survey of India, several campaigns were conducted to clear the site, and new caves were discovered. In 1958 Deshpande (1959, 72–73 and 88–90) found at the site six crystal reliquaries. Three of these, which contained bone fragments and coral beads, were found in *caitya* hall no. 3, plugged in oblong sockets on the back surface of the *stūpa* drum (fig. 105).[35] Two other reliquaries were discovered among the rock debris of the forecourt of cave 4 probably from the collapse of the façade of *caitya* cave 3, and one was found in front of cave 4, plugged into a boulder that must have originally belonged to the rock façade of cave 3. None of the Pitalkhora relics were planted deep in the domes of rock-cut *stūpas*.

The particular placement of relics on the outer surface of the *stūpa* drum in the *caityagṛha* 3 at Pitalkhora would suggest that relics may have been added to the monument later on, when it was already dedicated to worship. The fact that three more reliquaries were found at this site among the debris of the collapsed pillars and façade of cave 3 indicates that devotees also installed more relics in visible and accessible locations, such as in the front pillars of the hall or in the interior of the cave façade. Such deposition of secondary relics was a customary practice in the western Deccan caves, as confirmed by an inscription from the Karli *caitya* hall recording the giving of relics by a Buddhist worshipper. The epigraph carved on a pillar shaft states that a woman named Sātimita from Sopara donated a pillar with relics.[36] Below the

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[35] Two of the crystal reliquaries from Pitalkhora *caitya* cave 3 (reliquaries 4 and 5 in Deshpande's report) were found together in a socket carved on the outer surface of the *stūpa* drum. A crystal signet ring was found in another socket on the outside of the drum. Unfortunately, it is impossible to say whether more relics had been placed in the core of this structure, since the dome, probably built in masonry, does not survive (Deshpande 1959, 72). At Bhaja, Bedsa, and Kanheri the main dome-shaped monuments in *caitya* halls have sockets carved on the outer part of the drum; perhaps they were also meant for the placement of relics.

[36] Karli inscription 9: '*Soparakā bhayaṃtāna dhamutarīyāna bhāṇakasa Sātimitasa sasarīro thabo dānaṃ*' (Burgess and Indraji 1881; reprint 1976, 32).

engraved words is carved a lotus flower with a deep square socket at its center, surely designed to lodge the *śarīra* donated by Sātimita. The sacredness of the *caitya* at Karli certainly did not depend on this particular relic, but such a gift might have enhanced the holiness of the site, in addition to producing great merit for the devotee.

The evidence of secondary installation of relics thus becomes especially significant when compared to the lack of any indication of deposition of primary relics at the center of the dome-shaped monument in *caitya* halls. Perhaps such rock-cut monuments were not intended from the beginning to hold relics at their core. It is possible that the distinction spelled out in the *Mahāsāṃghika vinaya* between *caityas* and *stūpas* based on the presence of relics indeed captures the scenario of the western Deccan caves. In fact, the presence of the Mahāsāṃghikas in the region is confirmed by a Sātavāhana inscription from Karli explicitly mentioning gifts to Mahāsāṃghikas.[37]

Reference to the donation of a pillar with relics is also found at the famous Buddhist complex of Amaravati. This site on the eastern edge of the Deccan Plateau was very closely connected to Karli, as demonstrated by sixteen votive inscriptions from Karli that mention a place called Dhenukākaṭā (Dehejia 1972, 142), generally identified with Dharanikota near Amaravati.[38] An inscription from Amaravati, more or less contemporary with those from the western Deccan caves, cites the gift by a merchant and his wife of a *caitya* pillar with relic placed at the southern *āyāka* (projecting platform at the gate) of the *stūpa*.[39] It should be mentioned that what we now call 'the great *stūpa*' at Amaravati was never referred as being a '*stūpa*' in the inscriptions, but rather as a '*cetiya*' or '*mahācetiya*'. Much as in the western Deccan, the main focus of worship by Buddhist devotees appears not to have been called '*stūpa*' but rather '*caitya*'.

The connections between rock-cut centers in the western Deccan and Buddhist sites in Andhra Pradesh are not limited to the lexicon used in inscriptions. Both establishments show evidence that the ritual donation of secondary relics installed in pillars or on the outer body of the *caitya* was a common practice. Much like the *caitya* halls of the western Deccan, the Amaravati *stūpa* referred to as *mahācaitya*

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[37] Karli inscription 20 in Burgess and Indraji (1881; reprint 1976, 33).

[38] For a dating of the Amaravati *stūpa* railing see Shimada (2006, 89–141).

[39] Inscription 50: '*Sidham vāniyasa Kuṭasa sa bheriyasa saputakasa saduhu tukasa sanatakasa dhakināyāke cetiyakhabho sadhāduko dānaṃ*' (*Sivaramamurti 1998, 283*).

did not yield any archaeological or inscriptional evidence of primary deposition of relics. There are no relics placed at the very center of this structure. Instead, there is ample evidence of installation of secondary relics in the four projecting *āyākas* or on the outer edges of the dome encasement (Subrahmanyam 1998, 69–71).[40] Besides Amaravati, many of the relic finds from Buddhist monuments in Andhra Pradesh are not from the very inner core of the *stūpa*-shaped *mahācaitiyas* as one would expect, but rather from peripheral locations on the monuments. This is true of several sites in the region dating approximately from the beginning of the Common Era to the fourth century: the *mahācaityas* at Nagarjunakonda, Bhavikonda, Gudivada, Gummadidurru, and Guntupalle have yielded relics not from their cores but rather from the margins of the structures (Subrahmanyam 1998, 62–127). Of course, it could be argued that the very core of a *stūpa* dome is often the least well preserved part of the monument and that many of the primary relic deposits may have been looted. However, the fact that so many relics were found in Andhra Pradesh but only a very few were placed at the core of dome-shaped structures[41] suggests that the most common way of enshrining relics was not necessarily to place them at the center of the monument in the foundations, but rather to add them to the structure as a testament of worship. It would seem possible to argue that the *mahācaitiyas* in Andhra Pradesh were not necessarily built to enshrine a main Buddhist relic at their very core. The puzzling absence of a primary relic in these monuments is supported by Schopen's analysis of the epigraphic material from the area. Schopen (1998, 171) cites inscriptions from Amaravati and Jaggayapeṭa which refer to these great structures as being *mahācaityas* built for the Buddha, and 'the inscriptions themselves never use a term for 'relics': they say the *cetiya* is 'of' or 'for' the Buddha.'[42]

Apsidal *caitya* halls built of bricks, very similar to those excavated in the basaltic rock of the western Deccan, are also common at many

[40] The Amaravati *mahācaitya* thrived in the same chronological horizon of the early Buddhist caves of the western Deccan.

[41] This was the case, for example, of Bhattiprolu, where three relic caskets were found deep in the core of a *stūpa* dome right by the central shaft (Subrahmanyam 1998, 85–92).

[42] Schopen does not, however, distinguish between primary relic deposits (those placed in central cores of *stūpa*-shaped monuments at the time when the monuments were erected) and secondary deposits plugged into the exterior once the structures were already in worship (Ibid., 75).

Buddhist sites in Andhra Pradesh. Most notable is Nagarjunakonda, where the *Mahāsāṃghika* order was especially strong. Here, between the second and fourth centuries CE, twenty *caitya* halls of various sizes were built in different parts of the vast site. Located close to the so-called *mahācaityas* and smaller *stūpas* and monasteries, most of these apsidal halls included a small *stūpa* structure at the end of the apse; in one instance a Buddha image was found in the hall placed in lieu of the *stūpa*. It is interesting that the only relic found in an apsidal hall in Nagarjunakonda was deposited not in a *stūpa* structure but in the pedestal of the standing Buddha image mentioned above, between the two sculpted feet (Subrahmanyam 1998, 111). In Nagarjunakonda, the small *stūpa*s placed at the end of apsidal halls, much like those carved in the basaltic rock of the western Deccan, have not yielded any primary relic deposits.

In the western Deccan, the apsidal halls seem to conform very much to the scenario observed in Andhra Pradesh. We have no indication that central relics were enshrined at the time when the *stūpa*-shaped monuments (*caityas*) were cut in the rock. There is evidence of secondary enshrinement of relics plugged on the outer circumference of drums in *caitya* halls at Pitalkhora and possibly at other sites such as Bedsa, Ajanta 10 or Kanheri, where sockets are still extant.[43] Therefore, it seems that the sacredness of these loci of devotion did not necessarily rely on the presence of a main *śarīra* deposit, which the archaeology has shown to be optional. What sanctioned the power of these structures in the western Deccan was the fact that they were built for the Buddha and were continually worshipped much like the *mahācetyias* of Andhra Pradesh. It was the ongoing monastic and lay devotion that imbued these Buddha *caityas* with holiness, and while *caityas* often held secondary relics, it would seem that a primary relic deposition was not necessary for establishing their sacredness (Strong 2004, 19).

In light of the evidence discussed above, it seems clear that the Buddhist communities that used the caves of the western Deccan conceptually differentiated between '*caityas*' and '*stūpas*'. To them a *caitya* did not necessarily contain a primary relic, and its essence relied in the worship of it—a *caitya* was not sacred per se but was created by

[43] Such sockets may have been intended to contain donated relics, or perhaps they were just ancient repairs to the monuments.

the community to acknowledge the sanctity of a place.[44] This perceived holiness seems to have been augmented by the addition of donated relics.[45]

Structures that in the western Deccan were called *stūpas* in the incriptions, on the other hand, were defined by the presence of a buried relic and had a clear funerary function.[46] Several cave inscriptions demonstrate that the term *stūpa (thūpo)* is used exclusively in the context of monastic dead. In Bhaja cave 10, where a group of *stūpas* were carved to commemorate deceased monks, six epigraphs identify the monks for whom the monuments were created (Nagaraju 1981, 330, nos. 7–12). The most complete inscription, carved on the base of *stūpa* 7, reads '*therānāṃ bhayaṃta-aṃpikiṇakānaṃ thūpo*' (Burgess 1881; reprint 1994a, 82, no. 3). This was recently re-translated by Schopen (1997, 175) as 'the *stūpa* of the Elder, the Reverend Aṃpikiṇaka.'[47] The word *thūpo* recurs in three more inscriptions from the rock-cut cemetery at Bhaja (Nagaraju 1981, 330, nos. 9, 11, and 12) and at several other sites in similar contexts.[48] At Bedsa there is a single *stūpa* enshrined in a small apsidal unit, now roofless, located near the *caitya* hall. The *stūpa* carries an inscription in which the word *thūpo*, according to Schopen (1997, 174), unquestionably refers to the monument as having been created for a dead forest monk named Gobhūti by his pupil Asāḷamita. At Kanheri, a similar unit is to the right of the *caitya* hall no. 3, and the *stūpa* carved in it is also identified by an inscription carved on the *harmikā* as the *thūba* belonging to a reverend monk (Ibid., 176).[49] The fact that none of these small *stūpas* identified in the inscriptions have yielded relics does not affect the validity of the argument that in the Deccan caves the erecting of a *stūpa* was clearly

[44] See the passages collected by Law (1931, 42–48). In only a few cases do *caityas* appear to be associated with relics, and when they do, they never enshrine relics of the deceased Buddha but rather relics produced while he was alive, such as his cut nails or the hair he rescinded when he made the choice of becoming a renouncer.

[45] A subtle distinction between *caityas* with and without relics appears in some Pāli sources such as the *Jātakas* and the *Vibhaṅga* commentary (Ibid., 19–20).

[46] Bareau (1974, 290) elaborates on the distinction between *caitya* and *stūpa.*

[47] Previous editions of this inscription were published in Burgess (1883; reprint 1994a, 82, no. 3) and in Burgess and Indraji (1881; reprint 1976, 24, no. 3).

[48] However, Burgess (1883; reprint 1994a, 83, no. 4) reports only one instance, epigraph no. 4 carved on *stūpa* 8 at Bhaja.

[49] Inscriptions related to small *stūpas* erected at Kanheri in the so-called 'burial gallery' (ca. end of fifth century CE) also clearly label the monuments as being *stūpas* (the word *thūbha* is used). See Gokhale (1991, 109–136).

linked to an illustrious death. Many later texts confirm that the *stūpa*, whether built for a Buddha or for a deceased member of the community, had intrinsic funerary connotations, and it always consists of a dome-shaped structure.[50]

The distinction between *stūpa* and *caitya* in the context of the western Deccan can be defined even further: the rock-cut *caitya* is not intimately associated with death but rather is imbued with the vital presence of the divine. An inscription carved on one of the wooden ribs of the ceiling of cave 12 at Bhaja identifies the *caitya* hall as a *pāsāda*, a palace (Nagajaru 1981, 329, no. 3).[51] This clearly implies that the devotees perceived the Buddha as present in the *caityagṛha*, much as inscriptions from the Gupta period or later imply that the Buddha was dwelling in the *vihāras* (Schopen 1997, 258–59).[52] According to Schopen, beginning in the fifth century CE, epigraphic evidence combined with changes in cave layout indicate that the Buddha was understood as the main resident of the rock-cut monastic establishments. However, given all the evidence discussed above on the meaning and function of *caityas* in the early cave sites, it seems that this notion was not newly developed in the fifth century. Rather, it represents the culmination of a trend existing throughout the early phase when the *cetyiaghara* was identified as the Buddha's *pāsāda* at the site. A *cetiya*, regardless of whether it enshrined relics, was intended to celebrate a living presence, whereas a *thūpo* honored death. In cave 4 at Aurangabad, the *caitya* placed at the end of the pillared hall might never have enshrined a particular relic at its very core, yet it encapsulated, to the devotees, the true soul of the site.

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[50] See for example passages from the Tibetan version of the *Kṣudrakavāstu* in Vallée Poussin (1937, 276–79) and Bareau (1962).

[51] The term *pāsāda* also appears in a Bharhut inscription carved on the corner pillar of the west gate (Cunningham1879, 137, no. 65). In this particular inscription the term *pāsāda* is used in the sense of 'residence of the gods', as it refers to 'Vijayanta palace' in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven. Another word used at Bharhut to describe Buddhist shrines is *kuṭi*, which literally means house and obviously also implies the concept that the divine is resident in the edifice. The two edifices identified as being *Gandhakuṭi* and *Kosambakuṭi* are represented in a roundel depicting the donation of the Jetavana *vihāra* (Ibid., 133, nos. 20, 21, 22, and pl. LVII). Cunningham relates that the term *Kosambakuṭi* was also found in a first century CE inscription 'dug up' by him within the precincts of the Jetavana monastery (Ibid., 87).

[52] This point is further discussed in this volume.

2.9 The *Vihāra* at Aurangabad: Missing Evidence

The most puzzling aspect of the Aurangabad complex consists in the virtual absence of monastic residences or *vihāras* that can be linked to the phase of activity of the early *caitya* hall. James Burgess noted in 1880 the existence of some cells near the *caitya* hall (Burgess and Fergusson 1880; reprint 1988, 385), and thus it is possible that a *vihāra* was originally excavated at the eastern edge of the western group of caves, where the rock has now collapsed near one of the modern staircases (fig. 49). In fact, the peculiar position of cave 5, the last excavation of the group nestled high in a very inconvenient spot to the left of the early *caitya*, can be explained only if we consider the pre-existence of the small chapel 4 and if we postulate the presence of an early *vihāra* adjacent to the *caitya* hall (fig. 44, 7). However, if a monastery had been originally excavated near the modern staircase where the rock has now collapsed, it would have been a rather small structure for just a few monks, given the inconvenient configuration of the cliff in that particular area of the site. If we also consider the paucity of water tanks at Aurangabad as well as the lack of a water-control system, then it becomes very unlikely that a sizeable monastic community resided at the caves.[53]

The lack of a *vihāra* at Aurangabad could also be explained by the hypothesis that a residence for monks was built of bricks or other perishable material at the foot of the hill, where a small monastery is now in existance. No systematic survey has been carried out in the area adjacent to the caves to confirm this. In fact, there is very little evidence of such practices at other cave sites because very few archaeological explorations have been done in the plain or valleys near Buddhist cave centers.[54] However, an inscription from Junnar mentioning the perpetual endowment of a sum of money for a cave, a cistern, and a nunnery to be established 'in town' indicates that monasteries linked to cave sites might have existed in the plain below the rock-cut sites.[55]

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[53] Water tanks were crucial for the survival of monks. Gifts of cisterns (*poḍhi)* are frequently mentioned in cave inscriptions. Large centers like Bhaja or Pitalkhora include several monasteries along with one or more *caitya* halls, as well as cisterns.

[54] Vasant Shinde, from Deccan College in Pune, has recently undertaken a promising excavation of the area beneath the caves at Junnar. A complete report of the excavation campaign has yet to be published. At Ajanta faint remains of brick structures were still visible at the bottom of the valley.

[55] Junnar inscription no. 3 in Burgess (1883; reprint 1994a, 93).

The absence of a clearly identifiable *vihāra* at Aurangabad is puzzling because in the western Deccan, whenever a *caitya* hall appears to be finished and dedicated, a monastic residence is always established in its vicinity. A close connection between apsidal halls and monasteries is also well attested at Buddhist sites in Andhra Pradesh, the best example being the complex of Nagarjunakonda, where a conspicuous monastic population thrived in the third century CE. Here the plans of different areas of the site indicate that *caitya* halls were invariably built close to monasteries, and in some cases they were even incorporated within monastic enclosures (Rosen Stone 1980, 125–126).[56]

Monks are frequently mentioned as donors of rock-cut apsidal halls in the inscriptions from the western Deccan.[57] This corroborate the notion that the *saṃgha* was highly involved in the veneration of *caityas*.[58] However, inscriptions never include specific names of *vihāras* where monks lived, perhaps because monks were not required to have fixed residences or to live in large monasteries right next to the *caityas* they worshiped. A passage from the *Milindapañha*, a text set in the second century BCE with sections possibly redacted at a much later time (Schopen 1997, 108), addresses *caitya* worship in conjunction with the practice of ascetic retreat and individual seclusion. These lines, spoken by Nāgasena, describe the morning duties of a monk: 'Just as, O great king, a rooster goes to roost at the proper and fitting time, just so, O great king, a *yogin*, earnestly committed to *yoga*, having swept the open area around the *cetiya* at the proper and fitting time, having provided water for drinking and for washing, having washed and attended to his body, having venerated the *cetiya*, having gone to see the elderly monks, should enter a solitary place at the right and proper time.'[59] Epigraphic evidence from the early caves of the western Deccan seems to confirms this picture, and monks who were active cave patrons and perhaps even involved in business matters (Schopen 2004, 45–90) still cultivated the ideal of solitary asceticism and forest dwelling.

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[56] See also Subrahmanyam (1998, 104).

[57] In the *caitya* hall at Karli, to cite one example, there are several inscriptions mentioning monks and nuns among the donors of the *caitya* cave (Burgess and Indraji 1881; reprint 1976, 29, 33, and 35–36, inscriptions nos. 12, 15, and 18).

[58] Schopen (1997, 99–113) has demonstrated the active involvement of monks in ritual practices, contrary to what emerges from western historiography of early Buddhism. The *Theravāda* textual tradition corroborates the notion that monks should worship *caityas* (Trainor, 1997, 59).

[59] *Milindapañha* 366, translated in Trainor (1997, 57–58).

Often the word 'ascetic' is used as an epithet appropriate for a Buddhist monk.[60] At Bedsa, an inscription carved on the dome of a small *stūpa* placed in a round cave adjacent to the *caitya* hall reads: 'The *stūpa* of…Gobhūti, a forest-dweller, a mendicant monk who lived on Māra's Peak—caused to be by his pupil, the devoted Asāḷamita'.[61] The prominent placement of this *stūpa* at the center of the site to commemorate an illustrious dead ascetic shows that at this time wandering forest hermits who did not permanently reside in *vihāras* played an important role and enjoyed high standing within some Buddhist communities. This is perfectly in line with evidence offered by one of the earliest known Buddhist texts, the Rhinoceros *sūtra*, which advocates the merits of solitary asceticism and exalts the monk who, like a rhinoceros, wanders alone in the forest (Salomon 2000, 5–19).[62] However, this emphasis on renounciation and isolation clashes with the ambiguous attitude towards forest asceticism expressed in the Sanskrit and Pāli written *vinayas*, which generally allude to forest monks with some disapproval.[63] Perhaps by the time the Buddhist order was rigorously organized and written canons were compiled, such wandering ascetics, while still in existence, did not embody the dominant monastic ethos.[64] When Buddhist ascetics are mentioned in many passages of the Pāli

[60] For example, the inscription from the front wall of cave 2 at Karli, '*Sidha Pavaitasa Budhrakhitasa deyadhamam*' is translated 'Hail! The meritorious gift of the ascetic Budharakhita' (Burgess 1883; reprint 1994a, 92, no. 17). Inscriptions at Kuda attest to the existence of male and female Buddhist ascetics. Inscription no. 4 from Kuda cave 5 mentions a male ascetic, while inscription no. 5 celebrates the donation of a female ascetic named Padumanikā, daughter of the ascetic Nāganikā (Mallebrein 1986, 27 and 32). Often the *saṃgha* is referred to as being a community of ascetics, as in the Kṣatrapa inscription 19 from Karli commemorating a gift by Uṣabadāta (Rṣbhadhatta). See Burgess (1883; reprint 1994a, 101, no. 6). In all of these epigraphs the term used for 'ascetic' is the equivalent of the Sanskrit word *pravrajita*, which also designates wandering ascetics.

[61] '…*ya gobhūtinaṃ āraṇakāna peḍapātikānaṃ mārakuḍavāsinā thupo*… *(aṃte)vāsinā bhatāsāḷa(ḷha)mitena kārita* (//)' (Schopen 1997, 174).

[62] The ascetic ideals promulgated by the Rhinoceros *sūtra* were certainly vital for some Buddhist communities around the first century CE when this particular manuscript circulated in the northwest of the Indian Subcontinent (Salomon 2000, 16).

[63] Schopen refers to many passages from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, a code especially popular in the northwest, where recluses and their practices are ridiculed. See for example Schopen (2004, 26).

[64] *Ibid*., 93. Schopen argues that *vinaya* collections were composed much later than previously believed and that they do not reflect the early stages of Buddhist monasticism, documented in archaeology, when monastic settlements were still rather unorganized (*Ibid*., 2).

vinaya and in *Mahāyāna* texts such as the *Ugraparipṛcchā* dated to before the second century CE (Nattier 2004, 89), the forest monks were no longer wandering alone like rhinos but rather lived in *vihāras* located in the wilderness.[65]

The rock-cut monasteries established in the western Deccan seem, therefore, to speak for the very critical phase when Buddhist monasticism 'domesticated' and institutionalized the idea of forest asceticism. In Indian culture, taking residence in a cave has always been emblematic of asceticism and renounciation. Inscriptions from several caves demonstrate that monks still cherished the ideal of Buddhist forest asceticism and that they referred to their rock-cut residences as *leṇas* (caves) and not *vihāras*.[66] Yet monks who inhabited these Buddhist caves were by no means isolated, and they formed the very first loosely organized nuclei of *saṃgha* in the history of the Indian Subcontinent. The cave communities therefore seem to constitute, in many ways, hybrid monastic establishments intermediate between the ideal of forest asceticism and that of a settled monastic order. In fact, many of these rock-cut centers seem to predate the tightly organized monasticism portrayed in the *vinayas* (Schopen 2004, 78) and document a crucial phase of transition in the history of Buddhist monasticism at the beginning of the Common Era. They constitute a very successful effort to reconcile the old idea of ascetic seclusion with that of institutional monasticism dominating the written discipline codes. Schopen has rightly pointed out that monks living in poorly structured residences like those at Bhaja and Junnar could hardly have produced the detailed rules enunciated in the *vinayas*.

Yet at some cave sites such as Pitalkhora, Ajanta or Nasik there are well-planned monastic dwellings that recall the layout of square

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[65] *Ibid.*, 93.

[66] Most of the early votive inscriptions from the Buddhist caves in the western Deccan refer to monastic residences as *leṇas*. The word *vihāra* found in the Pāli and Sanskrit *vinayas* as an equivalent of 'monastery' does not appear in the western Deccan except for rare instances. In Nasik, an inscription dated to the year 9 of the Ābhīra king Īśvarasena mentions the donation of medicine to monks living in the *vihāra* of Mount Triraśmi (Burgess 1883; reprint 1994a, 104). Another epigraph from cave 32 at Kanheri alludes to a *vihāra* in Kalyan and to a *chātusāla* or quadrangular hall (Gokhale 1991, 79–81). Monnier-Williams (1990) explains the original meaning of the word *vihāra* as 'a place for wandering, walking for pleasure'. However, the main significance of the root *vi-√hṛi* is 'separate or distribute', which clearly refers to the *vihāra* as an organized structure where space is redistributed among the monks. The *vihāra* thus seems to be conceptually linked to the existence of a monastic code.

monasteries of the Kuṣāṇa period. If we take the diffusion of the classic quadrangular *vihāra* type as a tangible sign of the institutionalization of the *saṃgha* as reflected in the literary *vinayas* (Schopen 2004, 79), then the well-planned, quadrangular residential caves with small cells on the sides would seem to reflect the emergence of some kind of organization within the *saṃgha*.[67] Thus the rock-cut sites of the western Deccan, unlike pre-Kuṣāṇa Buddhist centers in North India that, according to Schopen (2004, 78), pre-date the *vinayas*, document step by step how monastic communities gave up forest ideals to adopt strictly regulated configurations sanctioned in the written *vinayas*.[68]

It is generally agreed that Buddhist rock-cut centers in the western Deccan thrived between the second century BCE and the second century CE, a time that, according to the latest scholarship, overlaps with the gestational phase of the various written *vinayas*. Yet it appears that the diffusion of a '*vinaya*-type' *vihāra* in the region is not exclusively a function of chronology. Sites like Bhaja, Junnar, Karad, Kuda and Kanheri that span the whole period of early Buddhist activity in the western Deccan (Dehejia 1972, table II) have very diverse monasteries characterized by a variable number of cells arranged asymmetrically on one or two sides of small porches. On the other hand, centers like Karli, Nasik, Pitalkhora or Ajanta include some well-structured residential caves that have a square plan and small cells aligned along the three sides of the excavation (Nagaraju 1981, pls. 19–59; Dhavalikar 1984, 51–66). One question immediately comes to mind: How can we interpret such an idiosyncratic diffusion of the quadrangular type of monastery in the western Deccan? One simple answer could be that different monastery types were linked to specific sectarian affiliations, however this is almost impossible to establish in the western Deccan caves or elsewhere. On the other hand, as we map all the western

[67] The same can be said of many Buddhist centers located in Andhra Pradesh. We notice the same shift from loosely organized monastic quarters at early sites like Tothlakonda, dating around the beginning of the Common Era, to later, well-structured *vihāras*, such as the ones excavated at Nagarjunakonda, which undoubtedly indicate a *saṃgha* living in accordance with *vinaya* rules. For Tothlakonda see Fogelin (2006). For plans of Nagarjunakonda's monasteries see Rosen Stone (1980, 125–26).

[68] I do agree with Schopen in his assessment of pre-Kuṣāṇa monasticism. I would add that there are virtually no representations of Buddhist monks in the art of the pre-Kuṣāṇa period. Monks as we know them from later Buddhist imagery, with shaved heads and robes, appear in the visual arts only after the beginning of the Common Era, at a time that seems to have coincided with the phase of canonization of monastic rules (*vinaya*).

Deccan sites with quadrangular, organized monasteries it will become apparent that they were all included at some point in the orbit of Kṣatrapa power. Nasik and Karli have major Kṣatrapa inscriptions, whereas the sites of Pitalkhora and Ajanta located inland near Aurangabad were probably within the Kṣatrapa sphere of influence during the first century CE, when Nahapāna put a serious dent in Sātavāhana power in the region. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that Kṣatrapa patronage may have played a role in the diffusion of the quadrangular *vihāra* in the western Deccan.

For the caves at Aurangabad, it is especially difficult to hypothesize about the 'missing' *vihāra*, considering the great diversity of monastic residential units existing in the western Deccan. It is possible, however, to formulate some tentative scenarios to explain the puzzling absence of a significant monastic dwelling at Aurangabad:

1. Only a few monks resided permanently at the caves in those cells (now collapsed) noted by Burgess and Fergusson in 1880 (reprint 1988, 385) near the *caitya* hall. Most of the monks who lived at Aurangabad followed an ascetic path, and so there was no need to excavate a major *vihāra* at the site.
2. Just a few members of the *saṃgha* lived in the rock-cut cells; most of the monastic component was based in residential units built at the foot of the hill. This is a tempting supposition, especially considering the chronological and geographical proximity of the Aurangabad caves to Ajanta, where well-organized, quadrangular rock-cut dwellings existed, as well as brick structures located across the river below the caves. This hypothesis, however, cannot be proven without proper archaeological excavations.
3. Only a small number of monks lived at Aurangabad; the site was supported and frequently visited by the laity. The location of the caves, open to the plain, might corroborate this hypothesis, which I have discussed elsewhere (Brancaccio 2000, 41–50).

2.10 The Aurangabad Caves and the Ajanta Cluster: Agriculture, Trade, and Patronage Between the Sātavāhanas and the Kṣatrapas

The early life of Aurangabad was undoubtedly tied closely to that of Ajanta and Pitalkhora, established on different slopes of the same mountain range. The Ajanta range is near the Tapi river and the Purna

river and its tributaries. It has a very favorable position in the Deccan Plateau overlooking Andhra Pradesh, the Narmada valley and Madhya Pradesh, and the Indian Ocean ports of southern Gujarat. All the early cave sites established on the slopes of the Ajanta range surely benefited from the wealth generated by both trade and agriculture.[69] As Morrison (1995, 217) has argued, 'The locational dynamics of monastic sites may be viewed as multiple and complex, related both to agricultural and to non-agricultural production and distribution.'

Agriculture has rarely been considered a means of support for the caves of the western Deccan, since most of the inscriptions indicate that patrons of the caves were mostly merchants, craftsmen, and city people.[70] However, at the site of Kanheri near the port of Kalyan an inscription mentions the gift of a water reservoir by a merchant, obviously referring to the construction of a dam to improve the agricultural use of land nearby.[71] This donation is especially notable because it shows that merchants invested resources derived from business enterprises in rural activities through the mediation of monastic institutions. This means not only that the wealth of landowners was invested in trade activities, as remarked by Thapar (1996, 24), but also that money earned in commerce was reinvested in the improvement of local agriculture, thus coming full circle. Also found at Junnar are several inscriptions mentioning the donation of large extensions of cultivated fields to the local *saṃgha*. This confirms what has been observed for Kanheri, since the Buddhist caves at Junnar are situated near the important pass of Nana Ghat and one would expect their subsistence to center on the commercial economy of the Ghat.[72] The Buddhist establishments therefore were clearly part of the nexus of the mercantile and rural economy of the time.

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[69] The importance of trade is generally overemphasized when considering the patronage of all early Buddhist monuments. For example, Reddy (1998, 291–311) has been able to show that around the beginning of the Common Era traders did not play an important role in the patronage of Buddhist sites in Andhra Pradesh.

[70] There are, however, a handful of epigraphs recording gifts by devotees who were involved in agricultural activities. See for example inscription no. 10, from Bhaja, in which the donor identifies herself as the ploughman's wife, or inscription no. 31 from Junnar, where a seven-celled cave and cistern were given by the guild of corn dealers at Manmodi Hill. For Bhaja see Burgess (1883; reprint 1994a, 83); for Junnar see Burgess and Indraji (1881; reprint 1976, 54).

[71] Inscription 32, engraved on a rock opposite cave 41 (Gokhale 1991, 84).

[72] Land gifts are mentioned in Junnar inscriptions nos. 9, 13, 14, 15, 17, and 18 (Burgess and Indraji 1881; reprint 1976, 44–49).

Devout businessmen coming from far away probably contributed larger, one-time donations to monastic settlements, but the day-to-day existence of a cave site must have depended on local agricultural resources. Observations at the Bhilsa Topes help to clarify some of the relationships between agricultural and commercial activities as they related to the support of Buddhist sites. Julia Shaw, in her study of the landscape surrounding the Buddhist complexes of Sanchi, Satdhara, Sonari, Bhojpur and Andher, which are roughly contemporary to the caves of the western Deccan, has been able to link the exploitation of the agricultural land and the use of water for irrigation to the growth and development of the religious centers (Shaw and Sutcliffe 2005, 1–14).[73] Yet no early votive inscriptions from Sanchi mention patrons involved with agricultural activities (Marshall and Foucher 1940; reprint 1983, I, 301–83); the donors were generally townspeople or members of the *saṃgha* and obviously had little to do with the rural world. Votive inscriptions generally record exceptional gifts collected for specific purposes such as the refurbishing of a *stūpa* or, in the western Deccan, the carving of a cave, a water tank, or a pillar in the *caitya* hall, but they are mostly silent about ordinary gifts linked to agricultural activities that must have supported the sites on a daily basis. Even the epigraphs that mention the donation of cultivated fields to the *saṃgha* in Junnar by no means record *routine* events: the amount of land given and the related revenue were huge, making these donations extraordinary and worthy of being perennially inscribed in rock.[74] Inscriptions from early Buddhist sites could almost be compared to the plaques with names of donors that are ubiquitous in American museums. The names inscribed on these plaques record only individuals who gave major gifts, often linked to important renovation projects; they do not mention the multitude of givers who with smaller contributions allow the institution to operate from day to day. In essence, the great

[73] Similar remarks have been made by Luca M. Olivieri and Massimo Vidale in the context of the Swat valley of Northern Pakistan (Olivieri, Vidale et al. 2006, 131–135).

[74] The amount of land donated at Junnar and recorded in the inscriptions varies between 15 and 32 *nivatanas* per individual gift, the *nivatana* being the land measurement unit used at the time. If we compare the size of these private donations to the 100 *nivatanas* of land given by the Sātavāhana king Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi at Nasik, we see that the sum of individual gifts of land at Junnar must have been enormous. Compare Junnar inscriptions nos. 9, 13, 14, 15, 17, and 18 in Burgess and Indraji (1881; reprint 1976, 44–49) with the Sātavāhana inscription no. 14 from Nasik in Burgess (1883; reprint 1994a, 105–106).

emphasis that Buddhist epigraphs place on trade is somewhat misleading, because it reflects only the major component of the patronage system. As a result we are left in the dark as to the vital relationships between monasteries and the neighboring rural areas that allowed these sites to survive.

In fact, rock-cut centers must have been plugged into the local rural landscape. A votive inscription from Junnar records that some of the land given was located right next to the caves '...three *nivatanas* given at the hill-foot near Mānamukaḍa (Manmodi) Hill'.[75] This confirms Morrison's argument that cave sites were not only strategically positioned to take advantage of the trade routes but were also situated to exploit agricultural areas.[76] Long-distance trade certainly stimulated a tremendous growth of agricultural activities in the region as cotton cloth and garments became some of the most desired Indian exports on the international market. The *Periplus* specifically refers to the city of Ter in the western Deccan as one of the main places for the production of a 'large quantity of cloth of ordinary quality and all kinds of cotton garments' that were shipped across the Indian Ocean.[77] This implies that the fertile 'black cotton soil' of the western Deccan was exploited to maximum capacity at the time to satisfy the international demand for cotton products.[78] It seems unlikely that a site like Aurangabad, carved on a spur of the Ajanta range facing the open plain, did not benefit from the cotton crops of the hinterland. However, only a systematic survey of the area surrounding the site will be able to clarify the picture.

Trade, on the other hand, has been proved to be a major driving force at the Buddhist sites located in the western Deccan. Many articles and books describe the intense commercial activities that took place in this region around the beginning of the Common Era.[79] Flourishing Indo-Mediterranean trade under the Sātavāhanas must surely have

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[75] Junnar inscription no. 14 in Burgess and Indraji (1881; reprint 1976, 46).

[76] Morrison (1995, 217) argues, for example, that the presence of large concentrations of sites at passes 'may have to do with the opening up of the western plain to agriculture as well as the expansion of agricultural production on the plateau itself.'

[77] Excavations at Ter have confirmed that this urban center was involved in Indo-Mediterranean trade (Chapekar 1969).

[78] As the name implies, black cotton soil, also known as *regar*, is ideal for growing cotton. It is found in Gujarat, Malwa and the Deccan and has been used to grow cotton since the Chalcolitic Period (2800–2500 BCE). See Ghosh (1990, 197). Images of cotton-making appear also in the Ajanta paintings (Schlingloff 1974, 87).

[79] Most notably Ray (1986).

supplied the lifeblood to Buddhist establishments. Many of the donors mentioned in the rock-cut epigraphs are merchants who undoubtedly played an important role in promoting long-distance commerce. In only a few instances do we have evidence of direct involvement of rulers in the patronage of Buddhist caves: inscriptions citing Sātavāhana rulers are found only at Kanheri and at Nasik, Karli and Nana Ghat (Mirashi 1981, 1–74) near the Junnar Buddhist caves.[80] The fact that almost all these 'power' epigraphs are to be found in caves carved in the proximity of the Ghats demonstrates the Sātavāhana interest in controlling vital areas for the transit of goods destined for Indian Ocean trade. The same cave sites also carry inscriptions recording large donations by another major player in this early historical scenario: the Kṣatrapa ruler Nahapāna, a Śaka who in the first century briefly took control of the western Deccan from the Sātavāhanas (Mirashi 1981, 95–113).[81] The fact that inscriptions by Sātavāhanas and the western Kṣatrapas appear side by side within the same Buddhist complexes on the Ghats shows that the fight between the Mahākṣatrapa Nahapāna and the Sātavāhana king Śātakarṇi was indeed rooted in a desire to exercise total control over the commercial conduits linked to long-distance trade.[82] Nasik must have played a key role in this struggle:

[80] Nasik was a key site for the Sātavāhana dynasty; the epigraph mentioning king Kṛṣṇa in cave 19 is the earliest Sātavāhana inscription found. Two different inscriptions mentioning Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi are engraved in the porch of cave 3, and three inscriptions by Vāsiṣṭhīputra Puḷumāvi (years 6, 19, and 22) are visible in the porch of caves 2 and 3. In the porch of cave 20 is an inscription of Yajña Śātakarṇi (year 7). In Karli, an inscription by Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi (year 18) is carved next to the *caitya* hall main door, while one by Vāsiṣṭhīputra Puḷumāvi (year 24) is in a cell of the quadrangular *vihāra* located north of the *caitya* hall. At Kanheri, an inscription above cistern 5 mentions Vāsiṣṭhīputra Śātakarṇi, and Yajña Śātakarṇi (year 16) is recorded in epigraphs incised on the right post in front of the *caitya* hall and in the porch of cave 81.

[81] At Nasik, all the epigraphs mentioning the Kṣatrapa Nahapāna are carved in the porch of cave 10. The donor was Uṣabhadata (Ṛṣbhadatta), Nahapāna's son-in-law, and his wife Dakṣamitra, Nahapāna's daughter. Uṣabhadata, who identified himself as a Śaka and who therefore belonged to the same ethnic group as Nahapāna, was also responsible for an epigraph in the Karli *caitya* hall carved right next to the entrance door opposite to that incised by Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi. Finally, in the fourth cave east of Manmodi Hill in Junnar, an epigraph mentions Nahapāna bearing the title of Mahākṣatrapa instead of the usual Kṣatrapa appellative found in the Nasik records.

[82] The content of the inscriptions left in Nasik by these contenders is of great interest. First, these epigraphs mark the beginning of a tradition that would have a long life in India—that of recording in a written document the gift of land to a religious community on behalf of the rulers in power. Second, it becomes apparent that while the gifts by Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi consisted mostly in land, those of the

the caves preserve epigraphs mentioning the initial Sātavāhana control of the region, then the victory of Nahapāna, and afterwards his defeat by Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi. On the basis of these documents, this unfolding conflict took place between the Gautamīputra regnal years 7 and 18 (Cribb 2000, 43). The numismatic evidence confirms the picture outlined by the Nasik inscriptions. The largest hoard of Nahapāna coins, about 13,250 silver issues of the western Kṣatrapa king, has been found at Jogelthambi in the Nasik district, and 9275 of these coins were counter-struck by Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi (Jha and Rajgor 1994, 72).[83] While the actual dates of the confrontation between Nahapāna and Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi have been, of course, a source of great dispute, the latest scholarship seems to agree that this conflict took place during the mid-first century CE.[84] Scholars have also identified the Kṣatrapa Nahapāna, whose power base was in Gujarat, with the ruler Mambanos mentioned in the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea.*[85] This, along with other evidence, has been the foundation for the dating of both the *Periplus* and the kingdom of Nahapāna to the middle part of the first century or slightly afterwards.[86]

Considerable attention has been devoted to the chronological issues surrounding Nahapāna's expansion into the Deccan, yet the impact of this historic event on the culture and economy of the plateau and its Buddhist centers has been overlooked.[87] Nahapāna's expansion must

Mahākṣatrapas were almost exclusively monetary. This indicates that while the power base of the Sātavāhana was more traditionally linked to the agricultural revenues of the land they controlled, the wealth and power of the Mahākṣatrapas was based on the trade economy. De Romanis (2006, 70) argues that the 2000 gold coins mentioned by Uṣabhadata in the Nasik inscription dated to the year 41 were actually Roman *aurei.*

[83] Also see Bhandare (2006, 84–97). It has been suggested that the silver used in Nahapāna coins was actually obtained from the melting of Roman coins (Cribb 2000, 43, note 38). The legends on the obverse of Nahapāna silver coins employ a mix of Roman and Greek characters (Jha and Rajgor 1994, 23).

[84] Issues surrounding this problem are discussed in Jha and Rajgor (1994, 3–7) and in Bhandare (2006, 84–97). A useful table of Kṣatrapa and Sātavāhana rulers put together by Joe Cribb is in Willis (2000, 44, table 4).

[85] *Periplous* 41.2 (Casson 1989, 77). Fussman (1997, 66–71), for example, disagrees on the identification of Mambanos with Nahapāna.

[86] A synopsis of the issues related to the problem of dating Nahapāna and the *Periplus* can be found in Cribb (2000, 39–54) as well as Shimada (2006, 125–126).

[87] For one thing, the silver coins of Nahapāna with the effigy of the ruler were the inspiration for the creation of Sātavāhana silver coinage with the image of the king. Such coinage started with Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi (Sarma 1980, 107–25). It also appears that the presence of the Kṣatrapas in the Deccan had an impact on the use of Sanskrit in the area (Damsteegt 1979, 207–15). The diffusion of Buddhist caves in the Kathiawar area of Gujarat, which was part of the Kṣatrapa territory, may be

have been dictated mostly by the desire to gain full control over the inland Deccan centers supplying goods to long-distance trade,[88] in order to divert most Indian Ocean commerce to his own dominion and to cut off the Konkan ports involved in Indo-Mediterranean-trade. The *Periplus of the Erithraean Sea* seems to document this historic confrontation between the Kṣatrapa Nahapāna and the Sātavāhanas; it states that the ports of lower Konkan were not secure and that foreign ships were taken under escort to Barygaza, at the core of Nahapāna's realm.[89]

The harbor town of Barygaza, identical with modern Bharuch in Gujarat, is frequently referred to in the *Periplus* as a cosmopolitan center having a major role in long-distance commerce. According to the *Periplus*, a variety of items coming from all over were available at Barygaza: precious stones, textiles and spices from the Indic world, Mediterranean wine, imported metals and sulfides, coral and peridot, raw glass, fancy garments, and Roman coins.[90] The detailed list of goods traded is long, and their provenance is often specified. For example, it is said that spices such as nard, costus, and bdellium were coming from 'the adjacent part of Skythia', likely the land of the Indo-Parthians that, according to the *Periplus*, bordered the northern territory ruled by Nahapāna.[91] Indian onyx, agate, large quantities of

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related to the involvement of Kṣatrapa kings in the western Deccan. However, the early Buddhist rock-cut sites of Junagadh, Sana, and Talaja are very hard to date, given their unadorned caves and the presence of very few diagnostic architectural elements (Burgess and Fergusson 1880; reprint 1988, 193–203). Some of the Sana, and Talaja caves can be tentatively dated to the end of the first century CE on the basis of similarities with architectural elements found at Nasik and Junnar (Ibid., 203). See also Mitra (1971, 146–148).

[88] The find spots of Nahapāna coins are very telling. These coins have been found mostly in Gujarat, Nahapāna's home base, and in the inner region of the Deccan plateau. No Nahapāna coins have been found on the Konkan coast with the exception of a single lead one excavated at Kanheri (Jha and Rajgor 1994, 76). Besides the major silver hoard found near Nasik at Jogelthambi, Nahapāna copper and lead coins have been found mostly in the Aurangabad region at Bhokardan, a Sātavāhana town near Aurangabad that produced goods destined for the Indo-Mediterranean trade, at Nevasa, and at Junnar (Ibid., 27–28).

[89] *Periplous* 52.20–21 (Casson 1989, 83 and 274, note 13).

[90] *Periplous* 49 (Casson 1989, 16, no. 48). The Roman coins available in Barygaza are listed by the author of the *Periplus* among foreign objects traded in the emporium, while old drachmas with Greek legends by Apollodotus and Menander, who ruled in the second century BCE, were apparently still found in circulation (*Ibid*., 16, nos. 47 and 49).

[91] *Periplous* 41.3 (Casson 1989, 77). For details on the spice trade, see Miller, 1969 and De Romanis, 20. Among the Indo-Parthian rulers, the best known is Gondophares,

cotton and other textiles, on the other hand, were brought from Ujjain (Ozene), the center of Nahapāna power in Madhya Pradesh, to Bharuch (Barygaza) in Gujarat to be shipped overseas.[92] Elsewhere in the text it is explained that these items were in fact the products of the heartland of the Deccan plateau, from the city of Ter and Paithan, and that they were also carried by caravans to Bharuch over long distances.[93]

This particular passage of the *Periplus* describing the presence of a trade connection between Paithan, Ter, and Bharuch is especially relevant if related to the establishment of the Buddhist sites of Aurangabad and Pitalkhora and Ajanta up on the plateau. If we locate all these sites on a map, they appear aligned along a north-south trajectory that follows the orography of the region. A route from Ter to the ancient port of Barygaza would probably have gone through Paithan and then towards the north, following the profile of the Ajanta range, to eventually reach the Tapi valley and Barygaza. On the eastern sides of the Ajanta range were the Buddhist sites of Aurangabad and Pitalkhora, while on the western sides were the urban center Bhokardan and the Ajanta caves. Excavations at Bhokardan have yielded a few objects that can be linked to Indo-Mediterranean trade, such as clay pendants imitating Roman coins and a well-known ivory female figure, likely a mirror handle, very similar to the Indian ivory statuette found in the Roman town of Pompeii (Deo 1974, 188–90, fig. 39).[94] The eastern edge of the Ajanta range must have also been touched by a trade route going from Paithan and Bhokardan to Ujjain, the town mentioned

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who controlled the region of Kabul and Taxila between 20 and 45 CE (Cribb 2000, 40–41). Eventually the Indo-Parthian kingdom was taken over by the Kuṣāṇa. However, the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, when discussing 'Skythia', does not mention Gondophares nor the Kuṣāṇas and says, 'The throne is in the hands of Parthians, who are constantly chasing each other off it' (Casson 1989, 75). Therefore the *Periplus* appears to describe the situation of instability in the northwest between the fall of Gondophares and the advent of the Kuṣāṇa rulers (Cribb 2000, 43).

[92] *Periplous* 48, 12–126 (Casson 1989, 81). The town of Ujjain was located next to some of the largest agate deposits in India (Francis 2002, 104). Both Ujjain and Bharuch are mentioned in Nasik inscription 6a as linked to Nahapāna (Burgess 1883; reprint 1994a, 101, no. 7).

[93] *Periplous* 51 (Casson 1989, 83).

[94] See also Mehendale (1991, 529–38). Perhaps the ivory figurine that reached Pompeii was actually made in Bhokardan at the time when Nahapāna controlled the area and was shipped from the ancient port of Barygaza in Gujarat, considering that Nahapāna's hegemony in the western Deccan began at some time after 50 CE and that the city of Pompeii was destroyed in 79 CE.

in the *Periplus* as being an inland emporium for the western Deccan trade goods destined for the international market.

The life of the Buddhist cave complexes carved in the Ajanta range must have been closely linked to the prosperity of these inland trade routes connecting Ter and Paithan to ancient Barygaza and Ujjain, in addition to the commercial conduits leading directly to the Konkan ports via Nasik. Unfortunately, the only Buddhist site of the Ajanta range that bears epigraphs mentioning the provenance of its donors is that of Pitalkhora. All the donors at this cave complex, which is among the earliest in all of the western Deccan, came from the city of Paithan. Pitalkhora occupies a key position on the western spur of the Ajanta range at the crossing of routes going from Paithan to Nasik and the Konkan ports and routes going north towards the Tapi river valley to eventually reach the ancient port of Barygaza on the coast.

Questions immediately arise—can we directly correlate the establishment of the Ajanta cluster of caves on the plateau to the flourishing of internal trade routes connecting Ter and Paithan to the ancient port of Barygaza and the emporium of Ujjain? Is it possible to reconcile the chronology of these caves carved so far away from the coastal system with the circumstances described in the *Periplus*? There is general consensus that the earliest Buddhist caves to be created inland on the plateau where those of Pitalkhora and Ajanta, both of which have been dated to the first century BCE. On the basis of analyses of epigraphy and architecture, the *caitya* hall 3 at Pitalkhora appears to be the first datable Buddhist cave of the Ajanta range, and we know it was completed with major contributions by donors from the city of Paithan.[95] The *caitya* hall 10 at Ajanta must have been carved shortly thereafter if one follows the chronological succession outlined by Dehejia (1972, table II). As for Aurangabad, the site was established later, likely in the first century CE, when a second *caitya* hall was added at Ajanta (cave 9) (Spink 2007, vol. 5, 131).

That major cave complexes like those at Ajanta and Pitalkhora were among the first to be established when the tradition of rock-cut

[95] Two early inscriptions survive on the pillars of the Pitalkhora *caitya* cave 3; they both record gifts of donors from Paithan (Burgess and Indraji 1881; reprint 1976, 39–40, nos. 1 and 2). At Pitalkhora, on the opposite side of the ravine where cave 3 and the *vihāras* are located, three smaller *caitya* halls (9, 10, and 12) were discovered. It has been suggested that these units pre-date *caitya* cave 3, however their fragmentary condition and the lack of inscriptions makes it very hard to date them securely (Dehejia 1972, 155–56).

architecture emerged in the western Deccan, suggests that this part of the plateau had a substantial Buddhist patronage base that rivaled that of the wealthy coastal area. The economic well-being of these inner areas clearly did not depend exclusively on sea trade from the Konkan ports of Sopara and Kalyan, but also on a complex network of inland trade routes directed towards the north, heading to the ports of southern Gujarat or to the inland emporium of Ujjain and beyond. By the time the *Periplus* was written and Nahapāna was in power, the Konkan ports were not doing much international business, but inland trade was still brisk. Onyx and textiles from Paithan and Ter were sent directly to the ancient port of Barygaza in Gujarat to be shipped across the Indian Ocean, or they were brought inland to Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, from where they reached different markets (Casson 1989, 83). The *Periplus* thus clearly implies the existence of inland commercial routes heading to the north from the towns of Ter and Paithan, and the Buddhist sites clustered inland on the Ajanta plateau certainly would have benefited from such traffic.[96]

Archaeological work has demonstrated that such a network of inland trade routes linking urban centers on the Deccan Plateau to emporia in northern India existed throughout the Sātavāhana period and at the time of the *Periplus*. Sātavāhana coins, coins of Nahapāna, and coins of the Ujjain type have all been found in the excavations at Bhokardan (Deo 1974, 19–81),[97] a town halfway between Ajanta and Aurangabad on the ancient trade route between Paithan and Ujjain.[98] Archaeological excavations conducted in Ujjain have confirmed

[96] The existence of inland commercial routes in the western Deccan heading to the north surely pre-dated the time of the *Periplus*. Scholars have suggested that the term *Dakṣīṇapātha* mentioned in Kautilya's *Ārthaśāstra* alludes to a major commercial Deccan route that brought precious stones, shells, and other luxury goods to the north. The name *Dakṣīṇapātha* occurs also in Pāli Buddhist texts, where it refers to a trade route for merchants going from Magadha to Paithan and to the western Deccan (Chakraborti 2005, 5). The Nana Ghat inscription (left wall, line 2; Burgess 1883; reprint 1994b, 60, no. I-A) refers to the Sātavāhana ruler Simuka as *Dakṣīṇapāthapati*, a statement that explicitly links Sātavāhana power to the control of long-distance trade.

[97] There seems to have been a very close affinity between the material culture of Bhokardan and that of Ujjain in the early Historic period. For the excavation at Ujjain see Ghosh (1990, 449).

[98] Ibid., 3–4. Inscriptions by inhabitants of Bhogavardana, the town of Bhokardan, have been found at the Buddhist sites of Bharhut and Sanchi but not in the caves of the western Deccan. For Sanchi see Marshall and Foucher (1940; reprint 1983, vol. 1, inscriptions 156, 162, 163, 234, 236, 237, 374, and 636). Sanchi is in Madhya Pradesh,

the far-flung mercantile connections of this city, which throughout the early historic period remained the gateway into the western Deccan. The range of artifacts from Ujjain dating roughly to the period between 200 BCE and 300 CE includes beads of terracotta, carnelian, amethyst, garnet, chalcedony, jasper, glass, bone and ivory, bangles of terracotta, glass, shell and copper, ear ornaments of terracotta, glass and of disk[s] of shell treated by a copper wire…antimony rods of copper or ivory, hair-pins and combs of ivory, pendants of stone or terracotta, including clay bullae molded from Greek or Roman coins, dice of terracotta and ivory…coins of the Kṣatrapas, Kushans…a coin mould of the Antonine [Roman] emperor Augustus Hadrianus (117–340)' (Ghosh 1990, vol. II, 449). Roman glass was also found at this site. Ujjain was heavily involved in east-west trade and was at the nexus of trade itineraries radiating in all directions: westward to the Gujarat ports, eastward to centers in the Narmada valley, to the north towards the Gangetic plain via Vidisha, to Rajasthan (Chakraborti 2005, 105–10) and farther northwest to the city of Taxila in ancient Gandhara (Pakistan) (Eggermont 1966, 3, 257–96).[99] In discussing possible ties between Gandhara and Ujjain, note that the name Ozene (Ujjain) appears in the famous Rabatak inscription from Afghanistan dating to the Kuṣāṇa period, where it is listed among Kaniṣka's conquests.[100]

Imported bone and ivory objects from the pre-Kuṣāṇa site of Sirkap in Taxila provide evidence of early contacts between the western Deccan and the northwest, possibly via Ujjain. An excellent example is the

not very far from Ujjain. Thus, a northern route from Paithan to Ujjain and beyond, via Aurangabad, Bhokardan, and Ajanta, must have been quite busy around the beginning of the Common Era. Donors from Paithan are also mentioned in the Sanchi inscriptions (Ibid., vol. 1, inscriptions nos. 214, 229, 546, and 717). Also, an image of a cave temple, likely making reference to the *caitya* halls of the western Deccan, is represented in a relief on the north gate of Sanci *stūpa* 1 (Huntington 1985, fig. 6.12).

[99] Lahiri (1992, 388) discusses the existence of a route that, beginning in the second century CE, went from the Deccan Plateau through Rajasthan and Malwa, the region surrounding Ujjain. It has been noted that with the advent of the Kuṣāṇas, the western Kṣatrapas played an even greater role in east-west commerce: they became traders of East Asian goods, including silk that reached India through the Kuṣāṇa territory and was destined for the Roman world via the Indian Ocean (Liu 1988, 11).

[100] About the Rabatak inscription, see Cribb and Sims-Williams (1995, 75–142), Mukherjee (1995), and Fussman (1998, 571–651). Findings of imported artifacts from the Deccan plateau in the Swat valley of northern Pakistan confirm the existence of such contacts (Taddei 2004). In addition, the diffusion in this area during the Kuṣāṇa period of imported ceramic techniques from the Gangetic valley should not be overlooked (Olivieri, Vidale et al. 2006, 136).

indisputable similarity between a bone handle discovered in the early strata of Sirkap in Taxila and bone handle found at Ter (Brancaccio 2007, 386). The Sirkap handle, likely manufactured on the Deccan Plateau, along with other objects of Deccan provenance found in Taxila, indicates that around the first century BCE a trade route connecting Paithan to Gandhara via Ujjain was heavily used. This long-distance commercial exchange must have brought tremendous wealth to the area of the Ajanta range, creating the conditions necessary for the establishment of the first Buddhist caves in that area around the first century BCE.

As we try to fit together the many pieces of this complex puzzle to get a better understanding of the early life of the Buddhist complex at Aurangabad and the related cave sites of the Ajanta range, the following points emerge:

1. Trade must have provided the economic foundation for the creation of a cluster of Buddhist caves on the Ajanta range, while the daily subsistence of the monks was likely based on agriculture. Aurangabad, especially, overlooking the plain, must have drawn some of its support from the rural activities of the area.[101] Cotton, an agricultural product very much in demand in long-distance trade, must have been one of the main crops.
2. A northern trade route passing through the Ajanta cluster of caves was already thriving in the first century BCE, as products from Ter and Paithan are found all the way into the northwest. A commercial route between Pitalkhora and Nasik, directly linking the Ajanta range to the Konkan coast and eventually reaching Kalyan, also must have been well-used at the time.[102] This explosion of trade

[101] Today there is a large reservoir for agricultural use near the caves. It is impossible to say if this water basin, known as Lake Harsul, existed in antiquity, facilitating land use near the Buddhist caves.

[102] Evidence of a trade route connecting Paithan to Kalyan via the Ghats at Nasik (and thus touching the western slopes of the Ajanta range) comes from Kanheri. At this major Buddhist site near Kalyan most of the inscriptions mention local donors, with the exception of two epigraphs: one mentions Nasik and another refers to a place called Rajatalaka near the city of Paithan (Gokhale 1991, 155, no. 2 and 152, no. 6). Although the dates of these epigraphs cannot be determined unequivocally, we know from the *Periplus* that Kalyan was the place from which exports from Ter and Paithan were ordinarily shipped to the west before the political situation changed in the first century CE (Casson 1989, 83).

in all directions during the first century BCE must have been the main force behind the establishment of the first Buddhist caves at Pitalkhora (along the route to Nasik) and Ajanta (along the route to Ujjain and to the northwest).

3. As Nahapāna took control of the Nasik area and cut off the ports of the Konkan during the middle of the first century CE, all trade items coming from Paithan and Ter and destined for Indo-Mediterranean trade had to be shipped from Bharuch (ancient Barygaza) in southern Gujarat and thus necessarily passed through the area of the Ajanta range. This major shift in trade must have brought even more wealth and patronage to the caves, thus triggering the expansion of earlier sites. The creation of a new *caitya* hall (no. 9) at Ajanta datable to the first century CE, as well as the establishment of the *caitya* hall (no. 4) inaugurating the new cave complex at Aurangabad, can be linked to the time when the Kṣatrapa king Nahapāna briefly controlled this area. The finds of Nahapāna coins in the Aurangabad district seem to support this argument (Jha and Rajgor 1994, 27–28).
4. The inland rock-cut sites of the Ajanta range did not depend exclusively on Indian Ocean commercial activities, and thus their prosperity and life spans were not exclusively a function of the sea-trade economy. Long-distance overland trade relying on networks internal to the subcontinent, together with agricultural exploitation of the surrounding land, possibly for the production of cotton, provided a conspicuous source of support to these Buddhist sites throughout the Sātavāhana period, before and after Nahapāna's brief presence in the western Deccan.
5. That there was an established trade route linking the Deccan to Gandharan centers in the northwest of the subcontinent may have major implications for our understanding of the Buddhist caves. The northwest was another key growth area of Buddhist monasticism at the time, and it is not impossible that some exchange might have taken place between the monastic traditions practiced in these two distant areas. One interesting point of commonality between the Buddhist monasteries of Gandhara and those excavated in the basaltic rock of the western Deccan is that they seem to have an identical type of square *vihāra* with small cells on the sides. This nicely organized quadrangular monastery type appeared in the first century BCE at Ajanta and Pitalkhora. In contrast, it did not

show up in Gandhara until the first century CE;[103] perhaps its diffusion in the northwest was the result of contacts between these two regions. It should not be forgotten that when the Kṣatrapas with Nahapāna took control of the western Deccan in the middle of the first century CE, the Ajanta range, although only briefly, bordered directly on the Gandharan plain.[104] Perhaps this temporary border between these two major Buddhist lands was influential in the Gandharan diffusion of the quadrangular monastery type found in Buddhist caves. It may not be a coincidence that western Deccan Buddhist caves, in which lengthy inscriptions of the Kṣatrapa ruler Nahapāna are found, such as Nasik and Karli, include perfect quadrangular monasteries.

[103] The square monasteries with cells on four sides at the Buddhist site of Sanchi have also been dated to the first century CE (Marshall and Foucher 1940; reprint 1983, I, 63).

[104] In the *Periplus* the kingdom of Mambanos is said to share a border to the north with the 'land of Skythia' (Casson 1989, 77, no. 41). If 'Skythia' was at that time ruled by Indo-Parthian kings (*Ibid.*, 75), then when Nahapāna briefly took over the western Deccan from the Sātavāhana, the region of the plateau occupied by the Buddhist caves would have been very close to Gandhara. The language used in the Kṣatrapa inscriptions at Nasik includes idioms from the northwest of the Indian Subcontinent (Damsteegt 1978, 213).

CHAPTER THREE

THE AURANGABAD RENAISSANCE IN THE FIFTH CENTURY

3.1 The Hiatus

Excavation activities stalled for several centuries at Aurangabad after the *caitya* hall was cut in the second part of the first century CE. The next cave to be excavated at the site must have been cave 3, considering its position right next to the pre-existing *caitya* (figs. 4, 7, 32).[1] The close resemblance in architectural design and visual idiom of caves 3 (figs. 33, 34, 36), 4a (fig. 45) and the unfinished cave 1 (figs. 11, 14) at Aurangabad and Ajanta caves 1, 2 and 26 (fig. 126), establishes a close link between the rebirth of patronage at Aurangabad and the late Vākāṭaka phase of activity at Ajanta. Thus, Aurangabad caves 1 and 4a can also be attributed to the expansion of this Buddhist site at the end of the Vākāṭaka period.

As older cave sites on the Ajanta plateau were expanded and updated during the fifth century CE, new modes of patronage, religious values, and ritual forms swept over the Buddhist communities. The rise of larger political systems such as the Gupta-Vākāṭaka kingdoms in northern India and in the Deccan Plateau transformed the socio-political scenario. It appears that at this time collective patronage of Buddhist monuments came to an end. In the Ajanta region the new sponsors of Buddhist caves were the elite linked to central powers. This important shift in patronage corresponds in the area to the surfacing of a major Buddhist movement known as *Mahāyāna*, which had been developing for several centuries. As a result of these important changes, the layout and conceptualization of new caves underwent significant transformations.

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[1] At Ajanta, when patronage revived in the Vākāṭaka period, the first caves to be excavated were those near the pre-existing *caitya* halls and *vihāras*. Spink (2007, 141) argues that cave 11, wedged between the early *caitya* hall 10 and related *vihāra* 12, was one of the first at the site. Lower caves 6, 7, and 8 were also part of this initial wave of Vākāṭaka patronage at Ajanta, together with the cave 26 complex sponsored by the local king Upendragupta (Ibid., 83, 113, 127, 311).

The first question to be tackled when addressing the renewal of rock-cutting activities at Aurangabad is whether the gap in patronage observed at this site corresponds to an actual hiatus in Buddhist activity. If no more caves were excavated, was the site abandoned and then reoccupied centuries later? A few factors suggest that the *caitya* hall at Aurangabad probably was never deserted between the decline of the Sātavāhanas and the emergence of the powerful Vākāṭakas. Aurangabad was a site that from the time it was established relied on multiple resources such as agriculture, cotton crops, and trade and was located in an extremely accessible position. It is likely that its day-to-day existence continued despite the lack of financial support from Sātavāhana international business. The discovery in the archaeological layers at Bhokardan of silver coins attributed to the third century CE Mahākṣatrapa rulers Rudrasena II and Yaśodarman II (Deo 1973, 58–59)[2] indicates that the area of Aurangabad continued to be included in the sphere of the western Kṣatrapas,[3] or at least was involved in northern trade with their capital Ujjain[4] well after the end of the Sātavāhana dynasty.[5] At the same time, while Indo-Mediterranean commerce seems to have increasingly shifted towards the southern regions of the Indian Subcontinent (Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Sri Lanka), a few early third century CE Roman gold coins of the Severii have been found in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh

[2] On the coinage issued by these two Mahākṣatrapas, see Jha and Rajgor (1994, 38 and 40). Rudrasena II and Yaśodarman II were among some of the late successors of Rudradāman I, a Mahākṣatrapa in the lineage of Casṭāṇa who is known from a rock-cut inscription from Junagadh in Gujarat, in which he added lines to a pre-existing Aśokan epigraph (Mirashi 1981, 121). The presence of a large group of caves at Junagadh also suggests contacts between the western Deccan and this part of ārat.

[3] The hypothesis that these western Kṣatrapas actually ruled over this area has been discarded by Deo (1973, 60).

[4] Ujjain continued to be a major international center until the western Kṣatrapas exited the Indian historical scene. In this important town Greek astrological texts were translated into Sanskrit under the patronage of the Mahākṣatrapas (Pingree 1963, 238).

[5] The western Kṣatrapas, descending from the ruler Casṭaṇa of the Kardamaka lineage, continued to fight with the Sātavāhanas for control of the western Deccan well after Nahapāna's brief conquest of the region. They were established in Gujarat and western Madhya Pradesh, and at the beginning of the second century CE their king Rudradāman I again defeated the Sātavāhanas. However this contest ended with the final victory of the Sātavāhanas, who managed to keep control of the western Deccan only for only a short time, eventually retreating to the eastern Deccan region of Andhra Pradesh. A marriage alliance between the Mahākṣatrapas and the Sātavāhanas, as indicated by inscriptions at Girnar and Kanheri, probably sealed the final peace between these two powers (Jha and Rajgor 1994, 5).

(Gupta 1991, 134).[6] This provides some proof of the continual involvement of these regions in international trade, although on a more marginal scale.[7] This shift in long-distance trade certainly did not put the ports of Konkan out of business.[8] For example, the archaeological evidence from the island of Elephanta indicates uninterrupted activity between the second and fifth centuries CE (H. Ray 1994, 63). Kalyan must have been an active port also during this *interregnum*, judging from the vitality of the neighboring Buddhist site of Kanheri. It seems that in the third century it was the south Konkan coast that played an important role in sea trade. In the hinterland of the port of Chaul, in the modern Raigad district, activity at the rock-cut sites of Kuda and Mahad seems to have continued throughout the first five centuries CE although on a reduced scale (Ibid., 63). The rock-cut site of Aurangabad also must have experienced some Buddhist activity during this time. It was ideally positioned between the basin of the river Godavari flowing towards Andhra Pradesh and that of the river Tapi, which

[6] On the topic of Roman coins and Indian trade see also Berghaus (1991, 108–21), S.C. Ray (1991, 138–44), MacDowall (1991, 145–63), and Walburg (1991, 164–67). A mold of a Roman coin of the Antonine Emperor Hadrian (117–134 CE) has also been found in the archaeological excavation at Ujjain (Ghosh 1990, 449).

[7] Newly minted Roman gold coins ceased to come to India after 220 CE. Long-distance trade, however, continued with the circulation of earlier Roman *aurei* that were preferred on the international market because of their heavier weight. This is confirmed by a Greek inscription found in Palmyra, a caravan town heavily involved in Indo-Roman trade during the Severan period (Sidebotham 1986, 172). Roman bronze coins, on the other hand, continued to find their way to the Indian Subcontinent. Although most of the finds of Roman bronze coins come from southern Tamil Nadu, one of the largest hoards comes from Gujarat. In the Rajkot district of Kathiawar have been found 64 bronze Roman coins dating between the end of the third century and the end of the fourth century (Berghaus 1991, 111). The western Kṣatrapas from their homeland ports of Kathiawar seem to have continued to play a role in Indian Ocean trade under the stimulus of the Kuṣāṇa empire, thriving in the northern region of Gandhara. The archaeological finds at Devnimori in Gujarat include a brick *stūpa* with relic casket inscribed by the Kṣatrapa king Rudrasena, an apsidal *caitya* hall, and Buddhist clay sculpture that visually combines the Gupta idiom with that of late Gandhara; these finds suggest that Gujarat maintained close links with Gandhara until the beginning of the fifth century CE. On Devnimori and its date see Mehta and Patel (1967), Williams (1982, 59), Lohuizen de Leeuw (1979, 166–67), and Schastok (1985, 25–31).

[8] Scholars tend to use information offered in Ptolemy's *Geography*, likely composed in 130 CE, to shed light on the contemporary Indian scenario and the activity of the Konkan ports (Hebalkar 2001, 5). However, this Greek text, composed in Alexandria, mentions Tiastenes (Casṭaṇa) as the ruler of Ujjain and Ptolemaius (Puḷumāvi) as the sovereign of Paithan, thus referring to an earlier chronological horizon immediately following the fall of Nahapāna (Cribb 2000, 39).

drains into the Indian Ocean near Bharuch in Gujarat, at the crossroads of important sea and land trade routes that must have brought some prosperity to the area even during times of political instability.

The vacuum left by the fall of the Sātavāhana regime at the end of the second century CE was immediately filled by the emergence of regional political entities.[9] In fact, it has been suggested that already in the Sātavāhana period local chiefs and kings had significant independence (Thapar 2002, 227). With the decentralization of power some of the last Sātavāhana kings mentioned in the purāṇic lists may have been no more than local rulers (Sinopoli 2001, 178). The epigraphic evidence suggests that by the middle of the third century, kings known as the Ābhīras controlled the area of Nasik (Gokhale 1991, 8).[10] They left the upper regions of the plateau open to the political and economic interests of the Mahākṣatrapas.[11] It is noteworthy that the Ābhīra king Iśvarasena left an inscription outside the veranda of cave 10 at Nasik, adjacent to the earlier group of western Kṣatrapa inscriptions associated with Nahapāna. Iśvarasena did not choose to have his epigraph engraved in front of cave 3, the 'royal' cave where are all the Sātavāhana epigraphs were placed. While this choice may have been motivated in part by the prime spot occupied by cave 10 at the site, the evident juxtaposition of the Ābhīra and early western Kṣatrapa

[9] While the historiography of the Sātavāhanas is a source of considerable discussion and the origin and power base of this powerful dynasty are by no means securely established, there is general agreement that this dynasty exited the Indian scenario towards the end of the second century CE. See Yazdani (1960, 83–130), Thapar (1966, 99–102), H. P. Ray (1986, 32–50), and Sinopoli (2001, 55–178).

[10] The Ābhīra king Iśvarasena mentioned in Nasik inscription no. 15 is considered to be the founder of the Kalacuri era, beginning in 248 CE (Gokhale 1991). On the basis of epigraphic evidence from Kanheri, it seems that the Ābhīras ruled in Konkan until the Traikūṭakas, their feudatories, emerged as a new power at the end of the fifth century (Ghokale 1991, 8–9). Mirashi (1955, xliii), however, states that the Traikūṭakas supplanted the Ābhīra at the beginning of the fifth century.

[11] Significant finds of coins of the late Kṣatrapa rulers have been reported on the upper parts of the plateau at Bhokardan, Paunar, and Basim and in the Pune area (Jha and Rajgor 1994, 72 and 75–77). Most of the coins found in Maharashtra are made of silver; however, the largest hoards of later Kṣatrapa silver coins have been found in Kathiawar, in the Kṣatrapa homeland at Amreli and Devnimori and in the Bhavnagar and Junagadh districts (Jha and Rajgor 1994, 68–71). Scholars have linked the availability of silver and the diffusion of silver coins under Nahapāna to thriving Indo-Mediterranean trade from the port of Barygaza. Perhaps long-distance trade continued to be the main source for silver for the successors of Rudradāman I as well. The archaeological finds at Devnimori in Gujarat previously discussed suggest that Gujarat maintained close ties with Gandhara until the beginning of the fifth century, when the western Kṣatrapa power was destroyed forever by the Guptas.

epigraphs perhaps can be taken as a sign that the Ābhīra kings and the western Mahakṣatrapa rulers were in competition for control of the Nasik region, possibly even including the area of the Ajanta range.[12] It appears that both the Ābhīras and the last Mahākṣatrapas were invested in the control of key areas in the western Deccan and Malwa, the region around Ujjain. Unfortunately, very little evidence is available to shed light on the relations between these two competing powers.[13] The Mahākṣatrapas, whose power had already been considerably weakened by the end of the fourth century, eventually capitulated under pressure from the Gupta kings. At the beginning of the fifth century, Samudragupta, followed by his son Candragupta II, conquered most of what was left of the western Kṣatrapa territory, but only Kumāragupta managed to finally eliminate the Mahākṣatrapas from northern India (Shastri 1998, 164–166). It is highly improbable that the Buddhist site of Aurangabad, occupying a key position in the western Deccan, was completely abandoned in the dynamic historical period following the fall of the Sātāvāhanas.

The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Fa Xian, who visited India at the beginning of the fifth century, refers to the existence of active Buddhist cave sites in the heart of the Deccan Plateau. His travel account includes a description of a legendary 'pigeon monastery', composed of multistoried caves populated by very large numbers of resident monks (Legge 1886, 96–97).[14] Although Fa Xian did not go to the Western Deccan, because he considered this area dangerous and difficult to

[12] Some scholars have argued that the Ābhīras briefly took over the western Kṣatrapas territory (Mirashi 1981, 79; see also Yazdani 1960, 156). Others have argued that the western Kṣatrapas took Maharashtra from the Ābhīras. Both hypotheses have been discarded by Mirashi (1981, 79). The fact that the Ābhīras did not issue their own coinage makes it even more difficult to determine the area that was under their political and economic influence.

[13] Inscriptions mentioning the Ābhīras are found in the territory of the western Kṣatrapas. In particular, an inscription from Mewasa in Gujarat indicates that family relationships existed between the Ābhīras and the Mahākṣatrapas. The date of this inscription is, of course, a source of debate (Mirashi 1981, 143–48). Two inscriptions from cave 74 at Kanheri have been dated on paleographic bases to the third century. These inscriptions mention the regnal years of a Madhariputra king Sakasena, and scholars have debated whether this king could be linked to the Sātavāhana or to the Ābhīra dynasties (Gokhale 1991, 8). Given the name Sakasena, it is conceivable that this ruler may have been linked to the Mahākṣatrapas, who were also active politically the area at the time.

[14] It is impossible to identify this site with any particular rock-cut complex in the western Deccan.

cross, the source he used suggests that rock-cut monasteries were still occupied by members of the *saṃgha*, despite the volatile political circumstances. The Ābhīra inscriptions from Kanheri and Nasik cited above corroborate this hypothesis.

At the Ajanta range sites, although they were not deserted by monks, excavation activities came to a near standstill until the fifth century. In contrast, the steady growth of the Kanheri caves in the post-Sātavāhana phase suggests that the economy of the coastal areas of Konkan became disengaged from that of the inland areas of the Deccan Plateau sometime during the fourth century CE. While the ports of Konkan remained active, their trade connections no longer reached the upper regions of the plateau, as they had in the Sātavāhana period. As a result of changed circumstances, the Ajanta range sites at the end of the fourth century came to gravitate increasingly toward the political sphere of the inner regions of the plateau.

At the beginning of the fifth century the Ajanta range fell under the control of the Vatsagulma branch of the Vākāṭakas, while Konkan went from the hands of the Ābhīras to that of the Traikūṭakas, best known from inscriptions found in south Gujarat and at the site of Kanheri (Mirashi 1963a, xxxi–xliii). The Vākāṭakas in the Deccan were the main southern counterpart to the Guptas; their original home was probably in the area of the Vindhya mountains in Madhya Pradesh. When the Guptas conquered that region in the middle of the fourth century, a Vākāṭaka constituency moved to Vidarbha, south of the Narmada, and established its capital in the vicinity of the modern city of Nagpur in Maharashtra (Bakker 1997, 14). The Ajanta range ended up in the territory of the Vatsagulma branch of the Vākāṭakas, which, under Sarvasena I or his son, split off from the main lineage based in Vidarbha and established a new capital in Vatsagulma, the modern town of Basim on the eastern edge of the Ajanta range (Bakker 1997). The Ajanta inscriptions tell us that Hariṣeṇa, the last major ruler of the Vatsagulma branch of the Vākāṭakas, and his entourage and feudatories were the new patrons of the site. They appear to have been responsible not only for the major expansion of the Ajanta cave complex, but also for re-igniting the kind of Buddhist patronage necessary for the rebirth of other Buddhist sites in the area.[15] The Buddhist caves at

[15] According to Spink (2005, 343–52), Vākāṭaka feudatories were also responsible for the establishment of a Jain cave at Dharashiva (cave 2), near the modern town of Osmanabad.

Bagh and Ghatotkacha, so stylistically related to Ajanta, have also been associated with the Vākāṭaka patronage of the king Hariṣeṇa (Spink 2005, 335–36 and 352–61). The Ghatotkacha *vihāra* near Ajanta bears a long inscription by Varāhadeva, the minister of king Hariṣeṇa, who sponsored cave 16 at Ajanta (Mirashi 1955, 112–19).

Recent study of inscriptions and related documents has shed light on Vākāṭaka dynasty history, relationships with the Guptas, and decline. One question still remains unanswered, however: What led king Hariṣeṇa and his court and feudatories to patronize new Buddhist cave sites and to become so deeply involved in major undertakings such as the expansion of the Ajanta cave complex? Never before had a royal court been so exclusively committed to a particular Buddhist site.

The epigraphic evidence shows that the Vākāṭakas were active patrons of Brahmanical temples and generous givers of land to the Brahmins.[16] Unlike the Sātavāhanas, who first adopted the custom of recording in written epigraphs royal donations of land to Brahmanical communities (Witzel 2006, 476), the Vākāṭaka inscriptions never mention monetary revenues or sums of money. This has led scholars to suggest that the Vākāṭakas relied mostly on a rural economy. This assumption has been supported by the discovery of many Vākāṭaka land grants inscribed on copperplate in the eastern parts of the Deccan Plateau. The scarcity of Vākāṭaka urban settlements noted by archaeologists (Shrimali 1992a, 108; Kenneth 2004, 11–18), coupled with the puzzling paucity of Vākāṭaka coinage, further supports this theory.[17] Thus the deep involvement of Hariṣeṇa and his court not only at Ajanta but also at Bagh and Ghatotkacha appears to be a departure from the traditional Vākāṭaka's *modus operandi*. The royal sponsorship of these Buddhist caves differs greatly from the known patronage patterns of the dynasty. At Ajanta, the Vākāṭakas offered support to a major Buddhist community and not to a Brahmanical one;

[16] Land grants eventually transformed the economic, political, and social structures in ancient India (Thapar 2002, 292–93).

[17] It has been generally assumed that the Vākāṭakas used coins issued by other rulers, such as the Viṣṇukundins and the Guptas. However, the scarce finds of Gupta coins on the Deccan plateau do not corroborate this hypothesis. On the basis of excavations at Paunar, it has also been suggested that some of the coin types commonly associated with the Viṣṇukundins may actually be Vākāṭaka (Shrimali 1992b, 143). Raven (2004, 19–32) has shown definitively that the Vākāṭakas actually minted copper coins and that their issues, although not copious, may have not been recognized by numismatists.

they exploited the in situ rock rather than using the more traditional ways of building in stone seen in the eastern parts of the empire; they had donations recorded in verses on visible rock surfaces rather than engraving prose on hidden copperplates. Most importantly, they invested an enormous amount of financial resources that were not measurable in land. Further, Hariṣeṇa and the Vatsagulma branch seem to have shifted the gravitational center of the dynasty from the inner rural areas to a region more conveniently positioned at the crossing of roads directed to the Ghats and hence the coast and to northern routes leading to Ujjain and beyond. It should be noted that the Talner copperplates, another major epigraphic document mentioning king Hariṣeṇa, were found on the banks of the river Tapi near the northern route connecting Ajanta to Ujjain.[18] The supposition that the Vākāṭakas of Vatsagulma gravitated toward areas involved in trade is confirmed by an inscription from cave 16 at Ajanta in which Varāhadeva celebrates Hariṣeṇa's power over rulers controlling key points in the international networks of the time: Kuntala, Avanti, Kalinga, Kosala, Trikuta, Lata and Andhra (Burgess 1880; repr. 1994a, 125, verse 18).[19] Bakker (1997) has pointed out that the word 'conquered' is missing from the inscription thus the epigraph should not be interpreted as a mere celebration of conquest but rather as a statement by the Vākāṭaka king who intended to position himself at the epicenter of a new political order that allowed the resumption of long-distance trade.[20] All of these factors lead to the conclusion that the renaissance of the Buddhist sites located in the Ajanta range and beyond must have been somehow related to the resumption of lucrative long-distance commerce in which Hariṣeṇa and his feudatories played a key role. Only trade could have provided the extraordinary flow of cash needed for the creation of so many new caves, and this involvement in trade was

[18] It has been suggested that this area was taken by Hariṣeṇa from the Traikūṭakas, who were ruling at the time in western Konkan (Bakker 1997, 34). Throughout so many political changes, Ujjain continued to be a major emporium at the crossroads of important trade routes as well as a center for cultural learning.

[19] Avanti and Lata would guarantee to the Vākāṭaka access to the northern trade routes. Avanti is the ancient name of the region around Ujjain; Lata refers to the region that covers the lower course of the rivers Tapi and Narmada.

[20] Aside from this inscription, there is no other evidence of the Vākāṭakas conquering and absorbing into their territory distant regions such as Andhra or Kalinga. It is possible that the Ajanta epigraph in question, much like the posthumous inscription of the Gupta king Samudragupta in Allahabad, includes a long list of countries subservient to the king who 'solicited their commands' (Fleet 1888, 10–17).

probably an important factor in the diversion of patronage away from the Brahmanical faith and towards the Buddhist religion and its rock-cut monasteries. Buddhist activity and cave patronage in the western Deccan had been historically allied to the mercantile economy. The establishment of the Buddhist caves at Bagh in the ancient region of Anupa at a strategic point in the Narmada valley, on the route from the Ajanta range to Ujjain, was also the result of Hariṣeṇa's expansionist vision. According to Spink (2005, 325), some of the architectural features present at Bagh indicate that this site slightly pre-dated Ajanta.[21] The lack of Buddha images in the axial cells of Bagh *vihāras* would suggest an earlier date for these caves that continued to be used well after the fall of the Vākāṭakas, as indicated by a copperplate inscription found at Bagh itself.[22]

Another important site linked to Vākāṭaka patronage in the Ajanta range is the Ghatotkacha *vihāra*. This cave is located in the vicinity of the Ajanta ravine, along with a few other small excavations that are incomplete and in ruins.[23] It bears a votive inscription by Hariṣeṇa's prime minister Varāhadeva, who was also the patron of the magnificent *vihāra* 16 at Ajanta. According to Spink (2005), excavation activities at Ghatotkacha and Ajanta unfolded throughout the years of Hariṣeṇa's reign. The original design of the Ghatotkacha *vihāra* was modified significantly during this time. A major change in this cave consisted in the introduction of a shrine with a large Buddha image in it, located on axis with the cave entrance. The Buddha, carved in *bhadrāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā*, includes small images of devotees, deer, and a wheel carved on the throne pedestal, like those found in the shrine of cave 17 at Ajanta, clearly hinting at the depiction of the Buddha's first sermon, at Sarnath. The Ghatotkacha *vihāra* also includes several votive images that were probably added to the cave after imperial patronage faded away in the area, just as happened at Ajanta.

[21] On the Bagh caves see also Marshall (1910).

[22] The Bagh copperplate was found in the debris of cave 2. Its inscription mentions that Mahārāja Subandhu, who issued the edict from the town of Mahishmati, was responsible for repair of the caves as well as support of the monks who lived there (Mirashi 1963b, 19–21). Spink (2005, 324) argues that Mahārāja Subandhu had family ties with Hariṣeṇa's descendents and sponsored later renovations at Bagh.

[23] 'A dozen miles as the crow flies from Ajanta' (Spink 2005, 352).

3.2 International Trade and the Elite Patronage of Buddhist Caves at the End of the Fifth Century CE

The magnificent paintings at Ajanta completed at the end of the fifth century suggest that long-distance trade was alive at that time and that it had a major impact on the economy of the western Deccan. The murals portray a prosperous and multicultural environment filled with people wearing golden jewels and beautiful Indian cotton garments of all kinds, and enjoying imported goods. Even the pigments used in the paintings indicate international trade connections—the blue, for example, was obtained from lapis lazuli imported from Iran or Afghanistan.[24] The dynamics of international trade in the fifth century, however, must have been quite different from those of the Sātavāhana times. While Indian Ocean trade and the northern route via Ujjain to the northwest of the continent continued to be the main commercial channels (Liu 1988, 32–33), long-distance exchange involved new intermediaries and considerable investment by the ruling elite. The fact that the collective patronage of religious monuments was virtually absent at this time and that kings, ministers, feudatories, and eminent monks were involved in sponsoring Buddhist sites suggest that the wealth deriving from mercantile economy was no longer widely distributed among several independent guilds or individual merchants, but rather was closely controlled by the ruling class.[25] As a result, court culture entered the Buddhist world.

The stories depicted in the Ajanta murals present us with glimpses of fifth century life, customs, and material culture. While they portray Buddhist themes, the characters are set in the same world in which the patrons lived. Since Hariṣeṇa's court and its feudatories supported the expansion of the site, representations of courtly life abound at Ajanta. The painting of the Mahājanaka *jātaka* in cave 1, for example, includes splendid palaces and gardens and people of all kinds. Recognizable among the crowds are many foreigners, easy to spot because of their

[24] Conservators have concluded with certainty that the source for the Ajanta blue is lapis lazuli (Majerski 1975–76, 58).

[25] The information we have about the economic structure of the Vākāṭaka territory derives exclusively from land grants (Shrimali 1992a, 101–15). Hence, we are left in the dark as to the possible organization of trade under the Vākāṭakas and their Vatsagulma branch.

different clothes, hairdos, and in some cases even skin colors.[26] As in other Ajanta paintings they perform the roles of listeners of the *dharma*, servants, and attendants of the kings.[27] Foreign figures appear so commonly in the murals that they must surely have been part of the social scene at the time. An excellent case is the painting depicting the Buddha's descent from Trāyastriṃśa Heaven in cave 17 (fig. 110). The ethnically different characters are represented in great detail, suggesting that the painters were not simply presenting generic 'foreign' types but that they were actually familiar with real people coming from Sogdia and other parts of Central Asia, Persia, the Middle East, and possibly East Africa.

The cave paintings indicate that foreign objects, along with people, made their way to the Ajanta region and became an integral part of the material culture of the ruling elite. For example, in the Viśvantara *jātaka* painted in the porch of cave 17 a servant from Central Asia holds an imported metal ewer as he offers wine to a couple while an Indian servant hands over a wine cup matching the fancy ewer (fig. 111). The artists represented these foreign objects in great detail. The drinking paraphernalia were painted brown, with thin strokes of white pigment to show that their surfaces reflected light, suggesting that the ewer and the cup were made of bronze or silver. These ewers and cups, possibly of Persian or Sogdian manufacture, must have been used by the local elite to consume wine that was also imported from far away.[28] This association of wine and foreigners carries through in

[26] There are many instances in which foreign figures are included in the Ajanta paintings. In the Mahājanaka *jātaka* illustrated in cave 1 it is possible to recognize Central Asian characters standing behind Mahājanaka as he listens to the *bodhisattva*'s sermon, while a foreigner, probably from East Africa, appears as an attendant to the *abhiṣeka* of the king (Behl 1998, 85, 99, 100). In the Sutasoma *jātaka* painted on the left rear wall of cave 17 many foreigners appear among the Buddha's listeners. Some of them can be identified as Sogdians, from their flat round caps and distinctive kaftans; a man of darker complexion wearing a pointed cap or helmet may be from the eastern territories of the Sasanian empire; a few other foreigners appear whose provenance is difficult to identify (Ibid., 202, 203). In the depiction of the conversion of Nanda in cave 16, a man probably from the northeastern parts of Africa appears as a servant (Ibid., 155).

[27] Foreigners from the west had been involved in patronage of Buddhist caves in the western Deccan since the very beginning: many inscriptions in early *caitya* halls mention *yavanas* among their donors (Brancaccio 2005).

[28] We know that since the time of the *Periplus* special vessels were imported just for the elite. Speaking of Barygaza, this early text says: 'For the king there was imported in those times precious silverware…and fine wine' (Casson 1989, 81).

another well-known image from Ajanta: the depiction of the so-called 'Persian embassy' on the cave 1 ceiling (fig. 112). Amidst *gaṇas*, fantastic animals and flowers is a scene where a man, seemingly dressed in Sasanian garb, drinks wine served by two attendants. Rather than representing the Sasanian embassy received by the Cālukyan king Pulakeṣin II at the beginning of the seventh century (Spink 2005, 181–83; Schlinghoff 1987, 59), this painting seems to depict a genre scene lifted perhaps from an imported luxury object, a plate or a textile. Such an image comments on the distant world where wine was made and abundantly consumed. A counterpart to this emblematic image is another representation of wine consumption in cave 2. In a square frame on the ceiling two foreigners, possibly from Central Asia, are sharing a drink of wine (fig. 113) (Behl 1998, 143). This time, however, the figures are so 'realistic' and vividly depicted that it is hard to imagine that they were not part of the world of the painter.[29]

Since the time of the *Periplus*, wine has been one of the main products that reached India via Indian Ocean trade, and the Ajanta paintings indicate that foreign wine was still imported and much in demand at the time of Hariṣeṇa.[30] Ceramic finds from Elephanta include late Roman *amphorae* and Sasanian 'torpedo jars' very likely used for wine, and there is an image of a boat transporting these kinds of containers in a painting of the *Pūrṇāvadāna* in cave 2 at Ajanta (fig. 114).[31] These items can be taken as indications that wine trade along the Indian Ocean was still a major business (Tomber 2007).[32] Probably the items exchanged along the sea route did not differ much from those

[29] The figure on the left wears bright-blue accessories, a feature often shared by other foreigners, seemingly Central Asian, depicted in the paintings. As blue pigment at Ajanta was obtained from imported lapis lazuli, which was presumably very expensive, one wonders why this color was employed for the portrayal of such foreigners and not exclusively for Buddhas, *bodhisattvas*, and other main figures. On the use of blue color in the paintings see Spink (2005, 64).

[30] Many centuries earlier, the *Periplus* reported that there was a market for Italian, Laodicean (Syrian), and Arabian wine in Barygaza (Casson 1989, 81).

[31] It should be noted that the protagonist of this particular *āvadāna*, Pūrṇā, is described as being from the city of 'Śūpāraka in Śroṇāparāntaka' which can be identified with the ancient port of Sopara in Konkan (ancient Aparanta) (Tatelman 2000, 1). This establishes an especially close link between the *Pūrṇāvadāna* and the regional context of the Buddhist caves of western Deccan.

[32] Schlingloff (1976) suggests that this image depicts a type of Indian ship used in long-distance trade, much like others represented at the site. However he does not identify the containers carried in the boat as imported *amphorae* or torpedo jars, but simply as pots to hold water.

included in the *Periplus* earlier; wine and precious metals continued to be imported from the west, while precious stones and cotton fabrics were shipped abroad.[33]

Precious stones were mostly destined to be used in jewelry and signets or seals, two artistic traditions that were greatly valued in the Byzantine and Sasanian empires to the west of India. It is not inconceivable that what pushed Hariṣeṇa to extend his influence over the regions of Lata and Avanti, along the lower course of the river Narmada, may have been the desire to control some of the most famous agate deposits in western India (Francis 2002, 106). By linking this area to his own territory that already included the city of Paithan, famous for its onyx (Casson 1989, 83), the Vatsagulma branch of the Vākāṭakas would have controlled the main channel of production and distribution of semiprecious stones in demand abroad. Another element that might have induced Hariṣeṇa to expand his influence to the region of Lata, between the lower course of the Tapi and Narmada rivers, must have been its flourishing silk industry. According to a well-known Mandasor inscription dated to the Gupta period, the silk weavers from Lata were famed throughout the world.[34] Textiles were some of the Indian products most desired abroad. Cotton from the Western Deccan reached the international market as demonstrated from the archaeological excavations of the ancient Red Sea port of Berenike where more than two hundred fragments of Indian cotton have been identified. They also include pieces identical to the ones represented in the Ajanta paintings for color and design that are found in layers that postdate the 3rd century CE (Wild and Wild, 2008). Cotton, in fact, was available in large quantities in Hariṣeṇa's own homeland. The number and variety of beautiful textiles represented in the Ajanta paintings, the careful reproductions of designs and color schemes, and the depiction of women making cotton on the left wall of cave 1

[33] Cosmas Indicopleustes, writing about Indian Ocean trade in the early part of the sixth century, states that 'cloth for making clothes, sesame-logs and copper were exported from Kalyan' (McCrindle 1847, 366). International spice trade was also brisk in the fifth century—pepper was imported from south India and Sri Lanka into the Mediterranean region. De Romanis (1997, 101) cites a decree of the Roman Senate dating to the year 408 in which the Romans gave Alaric large quantities of gold, silver, and pepper as ransom.

[34] This lengthy and poetic inscription alludes to silk weavers moving from the region of Lata to Dashapura, a town near Ujjain (Basham 1983).

(Schlingloff 1974, 87) show that cotton fabrics were not only part of the local material cultural, but were also produced in the region.[35] In fact, the Vatsagulma branch of the Vākāṭakas controlled the north-western part of the Deccan Plateau, a region covered by black soils excellent for growing cotton, while the main Vākāṭaka house occupied ancient Vidarbha, a land having soil good only for crops requiring artificial irrigation, such as millet or other cereals (W.H.A.W., 1928). It is interesting that the border between these two different geological parts of the Deccan, the western area dominated by black cotton soils suitable only for commercial crops and the eastern area with soils usable for food crops, corresponds roughly to the territorial division between the main Vākāṭaka lineage founded on agrarian economy and the Vatsagulma branch involved in trade.

Buddhism was also linked to the cotton industry in ancient India: a passage from the *Bhikṣuṇī vinaya* of the *Mahāsāṃghikas*, a Buddhist school present in the western Deccan since the first century, tells us that nuns were involved in preparing and spinning cotton (Schlinghoff 1974).[36] While the nature of the goods in demand on the international markets did not change radically from earlier times, the itineraries and the intermediaries involved in Indo-Mediterranean trade were notably different in the fifth century. After the advent of the Severii in Rome at the end of the second century CE, a significant shift in eastern trade took place, namely the Red Sea ceased to play a primary role in Indian Ocean trade. Instead, ships coming from India would sail through the Persian Gulf, and the imported goods were then transported overland through Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean coast. At this time the caravan town of Palmyra in Syria, located at a crossroads of eastern trade coming via sea and land, acquired great importance, to the extent that Palmyrene merchants not only managed the western end of trade coming through the Persian Gulf, but also established themselves in Upper Egypt to take advantage of Red Sea commerce that was still going on, although at a reduced rate (Sidebotham 1986, 171). Sea trade in the Persian Gulf was dominated, naturally, by Persian merchants. Since its establishment in the beginning of the third century CE, the Sasanian empire played a major role in Indian trade. With these intermediaries

[35] Preparing and spinning cotton was generally an activity carried out by women in ancient India (Schlingloff 1974).

[36] An inscription in cave 20 at Karli mentions the donation of a 'nine celled *maṇḍapa*' to *Mahāsāṃghika* monks (Burgess and Indraji 1881; reprint 1976, 36).

dominating the scene, the sea routes in the Indian Ocean underwent significant changes. For one thing, since the Persian Gulf was now the conduit of choice, coastal sailing was preferred to longer and more dangerous sea routes straight across the ocean. By the end of the third century the Sasanians controlled the entire coast of the Persian Gulf up to Sind which included some major ports involved in long distance trade (Dani and Qureshi 1967, 142). Sasanian commercial interests extended well beyond India: the Sasanians were heavily involved in East Asian commercial networks that, via Sri Lanka, reached Southeast Asia, where Chinese goods were available.[37] Although the Roman Empire faded from the international scene, Indian Ocean trade did not stop. The kingdom of Axum in Eritrea became a major force in the Indian Ocean business, and even a few fourth century documents redacted in Greek seem to confuse this East African region with India proper (Mayerson 1993). The Axumites controlled the port of Adulis, an established commercial center on the Red Sea since the time of the *Periplus* (Casson 1989, 51–52; Peacock and Blue 1991, 7–11). They maintained close contacts with the Roman and then Byzantine empires until the end of the seventh century, when their kingdom collapsed as the Red Sea came to be dominated by Islamic merchants.[38] The significant finds of imported wine amphorae in Axum indicate that the Axumites may have performed the role of intermediaries for Mediterranean wine export across the Indian Ocean (Bard et al. 1997; Manzo 1999, 355).[39]

[37] The conspicuous archaeological evidence for Sasanian trade in Sri Lanka is well illustrated in Bandaranayake et al. (1990). Cosmas Indicopleustes, writing in the mid-sixth century, alludes to the presence of a Persian merchant colony in Sri Lanka (De Romanis 1997, 186–87).

[38] The emperor Justinian at the beginning of the sixth century resorted to an alliance with the Axumite kingdom in order to defeat the Sasanian hegemony in eastern trade (Ostrogorski 1969, 74–75). Justinian's interest in the east is illustrated by a well-known ivory carving (so called 'Barberini Ivory' now in the Musée du Louvre in Paris, Acc. No. OA 9063) depicting Justinian as a conqueror of the world. Below the equestrian image of Justinian are depicted four small figures seemingly of eastern provenance.

[39] Many amphorae from the Mediterranean, along with a large quantity of common pottery very similar to that found in Axum, have been found in the middle- and upper-period layers (second to seventh centuries CE) at the site of Qana' in Yemen. It has been suggested that between the fifth and seventh centuries this site had a stable connection with East Africa (Sedov 1996, 11–36). A large number of torpedo jars similar to those found in Elephanta have also been found at this site (Tomber 2007, 984).

This information gives us a sense of the international scenario in which the Vākāṭakas from Vatsagulma positioned themselves. In the middle of the fifth century eastern trade networks were dominated by the Persians, and there was a consistent presence of East African merchants in the Indian Ocean. Merchants from the Persian Gulf and those coming across the ocean from Ethiopia very likely did business in Kalyan, since the port was very active in 550 CE, when Cosmas Indicopleustes wrote his *Christian Topography*. An important copper-plate inscription from the Kanheri caves confirms that at the end of the fifth century foreigners involved in sea trade were active in Kalyan. This document mentions that a patron from Sind donated a *caitya* (i.e., a *stūpa* shaped monument) at the site when the Traikūṭakas were in power (Mirashi 1963b, 29–32). Sind was a key area in the Persian Gulf sea route at the mouth of the river Indus, a major gateway to the northwest of the Indian Subcontinent, and apparently a Buddhist stronghold. Lohuizen de Leeuw (1979), in a seminal article focusing on the pre-Muslim archaeological remains in Sind, has pointed out that Buddhism was very prominent in Sind during the fifth century, despite the invasion of the Huns.[40] She also noted that many sculptural terracotta fragments from Buddhist sites from the Indus delta area show some artistic conventions that can also be found in the Ajanta paintings.[41] A prime example is the chessboard motif that appears in cave 17 paintings and in sculptural form at Aurangabad cave 3. This motif was ubiquitous in the brick decorations of the *stūpa* at Kahu Jo Daro near Mirpur Khas, dated to the fourth century, and in that of Thul Mir Rukan, which continued to be active at least until the tenth century (Lohuizen de Leeuw 1979). Taddei (2003, 449–57), in a study of the diffusion of the Greek fretwork across the Indian Subcontinent, has also suggested that Sind may be the key to understanding the diffusion of such western ornamental motifs at Ajanta and Bagh.

[40] The Huns, who had emerged as a major political force in the northwest of the Indian Subcontinent, became involved in major military confrontations with the Guptas in the middle of the fifth century. This may have caused a temporary disruption of trade from the Gujarat ports and their feeder routes and a corresponding surge in international trade from Kalyan. On the so called Huṇās of the Indian sources see Zeimal (1999, 123–33). By the time Cosmas Indicopleustes compiled his account in 550 the Huṇās are described as powerful kings in north India (McCrindle 1847, 371).

[41] The terracotta from Mirpur Khas reproduced here in figure 124 also illustrates the links existing between Ajanta and the 5th century Buddhist sites in Sind.

The cosmopolitan milieu depicted in the Ajanta paintings should, therefore, not come as a surprise. People from the Persian world, Central Asia, and East Africa alike are depicted in the caves because they were the driving forces of Indian Ocean trade at the time.[42] The Sogdians, originally from the Samarkand area, are the most recognizable in the paintings because of their headdress (fig. 110). They were the Asian merchants *par excellence*; especially involved in silk and textile trade between the fourth and the sixth centuries, they were very active in the upper Indus region, became recognized traders in Xinjiang (China) and the Caucasus, and established direct trade relationships with the Byzantine empire (Lerner 2001, 222).[43] At the same time, they also became very involved in sea trade and looked with great interest to the Southeast Asian commercial networks. The Chinese pilgrim Fa Xian mentions that in the fifth century Sogdian merchants were established at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka, and images of Sogdians as donors have been found at Buddhist sites in Thailand (Grenet 1996).

Some of the Indian trade goods most desired abroad, such as cotton textiles, were produced in the territory ruled by the Vatsagulma branch of the Vākāṭakas, and it is hard to imagine that Hariṣeṇa took no part in such a profitable business. The sudden rebirth of patronage at the Buddhist rock-cut sites historically linked to trade may also be considered an upshot of the revival of international commercial activities in the region. The prominent representation of a *dvārāpala* figure pouring quantities of coins from a bag on the façade of Ajanta cave 26 (fig. 115), implies that abundant monetary wealth was invested at the site. Coins are a way of depicting the kind of wealth probably accumulated through trade rather than agriculture. The detailed representation of

[42] In the Ajanta paintings foreigners also appear as attendants of the elite; it is possible that this was a custom at the time. From the *Periplus*, dated to the first century CE, we know that slaves, musicians, and women as concubines were imported into Barygaza 'for the king' to be employed in special jobs at court (Casson 1989, 81).

Foreigners from the west were also employed as guards and soldiers in south India around the beginning of the current era. A Byzantine source, John Malalas, an ecclesiastical historian writing at the beginning of the sixth century, says that as the result of a violent confrontation between Romans and Samaritans 20,000 young men and women were taken as booty by the Romans to be sold as slaves in the lands of the Persians and the Indians (Mayerson 1993, 173). While the term 'India' in the text by Malalas could be used as referring to the East in general, the passage nevertheless indicates that actual 'westerners' could be sold as commodities along the Indian Ocean trade network.

[43] On the Sogdians in this period see also Marshak and Negmatov (1999).

large quantities of coins on the façade of Ajanta 26 is reminiscent of the image of a pile of coins on the Cāṃtamūla I pillar from the earlier Buddhist site of Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh, where an inscription specifies that the money given consisted of gold coins (Rosen Stone 1994, 34).[44]

The Vākāṭaka king Hariṣeṇa, however, was not the sole protagonist in the fifth century renaissance of Buddhist rock-cut sites in the Ajanta range. His feudatories, directly invested in the management of the local territory and the wealth it generated, also played a crucial role in the patronage of rock-cut religious sites.[45] The Ajanta inscriptions as well as the *Daśakumāracarita*, a literary work that possibly alludes to the Vākāṭaka court,[46] indicate that Hariṣeṇa's power relied on a delicate balance of regional forces to such an extent that when this equilibrium was disrupted, the Vatsagulma branch exited the political scene.

3.3 The Rebirth of Patronage at Aurangabad: Cave 3

Cave 3 and the unfinished caves 1 and 4a mark the beginning of a new patronage phase at Aurangabad. Cave 3 is a small, perfectly designed unit complete with sculpture and once also with paintings, which survive in a few places (figs. 30, 31). The cave does not include any later sculptural additions such as the square votive panels carved on the façade of cave 1.[47] The outer porch of cave 3 no longer exists (fig. 32), but the interior area, with twelve lavishly decorated pillars defining a square area in the center, has survived quite well (fig. 33). The analysis of the cave plan reveals that the spatial distribution in Aurangabad cave 3 was probably based on an architectural module equal to the

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[44] De Romanis (2006, 77) has suggested that Cāṃtamūla's donation perhaps consisted of Roman *aurei* obtained through involvement in long-distance trade. Given the lack of gold coinage issued by the Vākāṭakas, perhaps the coins represented at Ajanta may also refer to foreign currency in gold.

[45] The influence that the local ruling class had in the Vatsagulma Vākāṭaka state is well demonstrated by the Ajanta inscriptions mentioning a variety of ranked ministers and feudatories.

[46] It has been argued that the eighth chapter of the *Daśakumāracarita*, a literary work by Daṇḍin, describes the historical events that led to the end of Hariṣeṇa's kingdom and thus sheds light on the last episodes of patronage at Ajanta (Spink 2007, 119–62; De Caroli 1995). Hans Bakker (1997, 37–39) disagrees with this interpretation.

[47] Walter Spink calls these later additions 'intrusions'. He has dedicated a whole volume to the study of painted and sculptural intrusions at Ajanta (Spink 2005).

measurement of the radius of a pillar (40 cm).[48] Such a precise design so carefully implemented suggests that a single wealthy patron with great vision was responsible for the realization of this cave.

The sculptural decoration of Aurangabad cave 3 shares much with that of Ajanta cave 26 (fig. 126), sponsored by the monk Buddhabadra, who is identified in an inscription in that cave as a friend of the minister to the Aśmaka king (Spink 2005, 419–20). The Aśmaka patronage at Ajanta is explained by Spink (2007, 17 and 311), who maintains that these Vākāṭaka feudatories, originally from the Aurangabad area, conquered the Ajanta region, overcoming the Rīṣikas. This interpretation, based on a historical reading of the eighth chapter of the *Daśakumāracarita*, attributes the end of Hariṣeṇa's patronage at Ajanta to the internal struggles between these feudatories and to the triumph and rapid loss of the gain by the Aśmakas. Thus, on the basis of noticeable stylistic affinities between Aurangabad cave 3 and Ajanta cave 26 possibly patronized by the Aśmaka ruler, Spink concludes that Aurangabad 3 and the unfinished cave 1 and the small shrine 4a can be also linked to Aśmaka patronage.[49]

The flawless architecture and sculpture of cave 3 may be the product of the same expert hands responsible for cave 26 at Ajanta, and it is possible that work at Aurangabad cave 3 may have continued even after work on the Ajanta caves came to a halt. The sense of completeness and confidence noticeable in Aurangabad cave 3 may well be the result of the best artists who worked on cave 26 and cave 1 at Ajanta becoming employed subsequently at Aurangabad. The exuberantly decorated pillar in Aurangabad cave 3 (fig. 34) and the majestic Buddha image in the shrine flanked by life-like sculptures of devotees (figs. 37, 38, 39, 40) can only be the creations of some of the best master artists who had worked at Ajanta in the imperial caves and knew well how to manipulate the rock. Much as the renaissance of Ajanta can be associated with Hariṣeṇa's grandeur, Aurangabad 3 embodies the pride and authority of an influential sponsor.

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[48] This was noted by the architect Giuseppe Monzo in an oral communication.

[49] Spink argues that work on Aurangabad cave 3 started in 475 CE and continued uninterrupted through 478. This is the period in his chronology assigned to the Aśmaka conquest of the Rīṣīka territory and to the end of most of the rock-cutting activity at Ajanta; he also argues that Aurangabad 3 was finished and dedicated before all rock-cutting activities ended at Ajanta, after the definitive end of Hariṣena's rule (Spink 2005, 327).

While the sites of Aurangabad and Ajanta appear to be closely linked in terms of patronage and artistic achievements, the roles they performed must have been very different. The caves at Ajanta, in the ravine of the river Waghora, seem to have been conceived first and foremost as monasteries—more than one hundred new residential cells are distributed among the fifth century *vihāras*. At Aurangabad, on the other hand, where the caves are carved in a very accessible position overlooking the plain, there is a noticeable lack of monastic residences. Cave 1, the only cave that could have been developed into a grand *vihāra* with cells, was abandoned right after the cutting of the porch (figs. 10, 11); cave 4a is a very small public shrine carved right below the older *caitya* (fig. 45); cave 3, the only one that was completely finished, has only four cells because the planners apparently opted to replace some of the residential units with two rectangular side chapels opening onto the interior of the cave (fig. 30). Perhaps cave 3 was never inhabited by monks: most of the entrances to the cells have door hinges that do not show signs of wear.[50]

The lack of evidence of post-Vākāṭaka patronage and activity at Ajanta seems to be confirmed by Xuan Zang's description of the site as a deserted monastery. The caves at Aurangabad, however, having no clear imperial links, thrived in post-Vākāṭaka times, when the *sāmantas* were emerging as major political and economic powers. Perhaps it was because of the 'local' matrix of its patronage that the rock-cut site of Aurangabad continued to be significantly expanded in the sixth and seventh centuries, when regional powers became the important forces in Indian history.

It is probably for political reasons that the sponsors of the Aurangabad caves sought to continue the patronage practices initiated by the Vākāṭakas at Ajanta. Those who were responsible for the late fifth century caves at Aurangabad may have deliberately chosen a new site with no imperial connection. Aurangabad was the ideal choice: it was very accessible, possibly located within the territory controlled by the patrons, and it had a pre-existing *caitya* that, we should assume, was in worship during the fifth century. Otherwise, new rock-cut units would not have been clustered around it. Thus the renaissance of the Aurang-

[50] The door fittings in the two innermost cells at Aurangabad appear to be similar to those found in the later period at Ajanta and labeled by Spink (2007, 386) as 'door fitting mode D'.

abad caves in the fifth century is intimately linked to the aspiration of independent local powers to imitate and surpass their imperial predecessors: by sponsoring the rock-cut monuments at Aurangabad the new patrons glorified themselves and the Buddha much as the Vākāṭakas did.

Aurangabad was not the only Buddhist site supported by new, powerful local patrons. Another cave, smaller and incomplete, located in a ravine in the Ajanta range at the site of Banoti, seems to be very closely related to the post-Vākāṭaka activity at Aurangabad. Two main phases of patronage can be singled out at Banoti: the first clearly has similarities to cave 3 at Aurangabad, while the second one seems to have similarities to the caves of the eastern group at Aurangabad likely sponsored in the sixth century.[51] The Banoti cave as it was conceived in its first phase must have been of modest proportions, square in plan, with a small porch and a shrine antechamber. The antechamber pillars and brackets and the T-shaped portal are similar to what we see at Aurangabad 3 and in the last caves at Ajanta. The Banoti excavation demonstrates that some of the sculptors used by the Vākāṭakas at Ajanta may have been employed by local elite patrons who continued, on a smaller scale, the imperial patronage practices.

3.4 The Sculpture at Aurangabad: Outdoing the Models

The emphasis on the sculptural decoration of cave 3 at Aurangabad is worthy of note. While much of the ornamental work at Ajanta was left to the skillful hands of painters, it seems that at Aurangabad 3 the rock carvers were responsible for all sorts of interior details. A good example is the long narrative frieze possibly representing the Sutasoma *jātaka* sculpted on the ceiling beam of cave 3 and the images of small *gaṇas* making music which in Aurangabad 3 are carved on the pillar bases (fig. 34) while in Ajanta cave 17 are painted.[52] The prominence of sculpture in Aurangabad 3 shows that the patrons of this cave had

[51] See Spink (2005, 336–43) for a thorough description and interpretation of the two phases at Banoti.

[52] The Sutasoma *jātaka* at Ajanta is painted on the back wall of cave 17 and on the architrave frieze in the porch of cave 16 (Schlingloff 1988, 93–112). The painted *gaṇas* in cave 17 are beautifully illustrated in Huntington (1985, pl. 12).

many skilled carvers to work for them, perhaps because rock-cutting activities at Ajanta had been significantly scaled down, leaving many experienced carvers available. Even at Ajanta we can see an increasing use of sculpture in the later caves. When Ajanta cave 26 (fig. 126) is compared with earlier caves at that site, it is apparent that the ornamentation in this *caitya* hall is mostly sculpted; elaborate paintings are lacking, perhaps because sculptors were so readily available at this time when patronage in remaining caves had faded. This does not mean that paintings were omitted from caves sponsored by the local nobility: traces of pigment have been found on the walls and ceiling of cave 3 at Aurangabad as well as in the shrine antechamber, where two *bodhisattvas* may have been painted on either sides of the shrine, as in Ajanta cave 2. The layout of Aurangabad cave 3 (fig. 30) also appears to be a variation of the Ajanta cave 2 plan with its central hall, side cells, and shrine antechamber, while the richness of the sculpted decoration evokes the atmosphere of Ajanta cave 26.

The ornate visual language of Aurangabad cave 3 appears to be a conscious manipulation of the Vākāṭaka artistic idiom from Ajanta and a statement of power by the new Aurangabad patrons. Let us compare the pillars in Aurangabad cave 3 (fig. 34) with those found in Ajanta cave 1, the 'imperial' cave, or in Ajanta cave 26 (fig. 126), supposed to be the latest caves at the site. The Aurangabad pillars are exuberant and densely carved, leaving very little space for painting. They are crowned by round, overflowing *pūrṇaghaṭa* and are ringed by bands decorated with floral motifs and small princely figures—a veritable sculptural *tour de force*. The Ajanta pillars, in contrast, are generally slender and lifeless, reminiscent of the wooden prototypes that inspired them. It is clear from the images of princely life captured in the Ajanta paintings that the pillars in the caves replicate almost exactly the wooden pillars found in palaces at the time. A good example is the Śibi *jātaka* painted in Ajanta cave 1: a king sits under a pavilion supported by fluted wooden columns surmounted by capitals and decorated with horizontal bands identical to those reproduced in the rock (Behl 1998, 72–73). All the patterns decorating the Ajanta rock-cut pillars can be found as embellishments of the palaces depicted in the wall paintings, but the carvers at Aurangabad cave 3 seem to have seen the rock-cut models at Ajanta and to have taken the stone prototypes to a higher degree of exuberance and complexity. The Aurangabad pillars rest on square bases, and small images have been added, almost in the round, to ease the transition between the round and the square at the four

corners. The pillars immediately facing the entrance to the shrine antechamber all have *nāgarājas* at the four corners, while the outer ones all have *gaṇas* playing musical instruments (fig. 33). They are symmetrical, so that pillars located on opposite sides of the hall match perfectly.

The images carved on the pillars, of *mithunas*, musicians, and *nāgarājas*, remind us of the iconography found on *stūpa toraṇas* and temple doorways marking the transition between the secular and the sacred. The overwhelming presence of such motifs in cave 3 suggests that the whole interior of the cave was conceived as a threshold between the secular world of the patrons and that of the Buddha, and as we enter the cave, a frieze identified as the Sutasoma *jātaka* telling the story of the *bodhisattva* as the son of the Hastināpura king is carved above the pillars as a reminder of the princely nature of the donors.

The most innovative aspect of cave 3 at Aurangabad is the presence of life-size sculpted images of devotees in the sanctum perhaps suggesting that the cave was a meeting ground for the worldly and the divine (figs. 38, 39).[53] These kneeling figures are aligned along the shrine's side walls and converge towards the main seated Buddha as if to direct the viewer's attention towards the sacred image (fig. 40). They show distinctive individual features, wear princely dress and elaborate jewels, and are not at all like a Buddhist audience witnessing the Buddha's first sermon, as in the case of Ajanta cave 1 (fig. 116) or the Ghatotkacha *vihāra*. The kneeling images in some of the main shrines at Ajanta are always carved in smaller scale next to the base of the Buddha's throne and generally show fewer individual characteristics.[54] According to Spink's chronology, small images of devotees appeared in Ajanta shrines only after the Aśmaka takeover of the site in 475 CE.[55] During this last phase of activity at Ajanta, which overlaps the beginning of the excavation of Aurangabad cave 3, numerous

[53] These images have been mistakenly identified as 'attendant deities' (Berkson 1986, 84–85).

[54] The shrine of cave 17 at Ajanta is the only one where devotees appear more individualized. They consist of two small figures standing on either side of the Buddha's throne. They both offer bowls to the Buddha figure, and their garments are vividly painted. Wood (2004, 128) identifies them as the local king and his brother who were patrons of cave 17. However, the two figures in Ajanta cave 17 appear to be much less 'royal' than those carved in the shrine of Aurangabad cave 3.

[55] The Buddha image in cave 11 also includes one devotee. According to Spink (2007, 155), 'It is the only image at the site, earlier than 475, to incorporate a kneeling devotee (or indeed any devotees at all) at the base, and it is particularly unusual that

devotees were carved in the shrines, as in the imperial cave 1 where nine small figures, including monks, kneel at the feet of the Buddha. The small kneeling figures carved in the shrine of Ajanta cave 1 are divided into two groups adjacent to the base of the Buddha's throne: monks are on the left and lay devotees are on the right. At the center there is a wheel with two deer, a reference to the Buddha's first sermon in the deer park at Sarnath. The emphasis on the devotee figures at Ajanta seems to increase with the growing independence of the Vākāṭaka's feudatories and the Aśmaka ascent to power. In the sanctum of the Ghatotkacha *vihāra*, probably completed at the time when patronage ended at Ajanta, the artists carved twelve small devotees at the base of the Buddha's throne, also distributed in two groups much as in Ajanta cave 1.

Aurangabad cave 3 has the most numerous group of devotees: fourteen life size kneeling figures in the sanctum, eight of them carved by the left wall of the shrine and the other six next to the right wall. Among the cave 3 kneeling figures there are no monks, which is not surprising given that at Aurangabad the monastic component was never dominant and there were few residential quarters. Instead, prominently represented among the devotees are four female figures with elaborate hairstyles and precious jewels. Likely the devotees in cave 3 portray members of the princely elite. They all have unique physical features and in some instances display distinctive hand gestures: most of the figures are in *añjalimudrā*. One devotee holds a garland, and the figure at the head of the left group, directly facing the Buddha, was probably offering something to the Buddha (unfortunately, his right arm is broken off). This particular figure (fig. 40) stands out not only because of his prominent placement at the head of the row, but also because he wears a band across his chest, decorated on the shoulder, that no other devotee has. He seems to be the leader of the group, and he is matched on the other side by a female figure placed almost frontally before the Buddha, ahead of the other devotees. Undoubtedly such individualized sculptures portray real people, perhaps the local feudatories and members of their clan who were actively involved in the patronage of this cave.[56] Following Spink's theory on the decline

the figure is a single one instead of the conventional pairs or groups found under later carved Buddha images'.

[56] On patron portraits in non-Buddhist contexts see Kaimal (1995).

of Ajanta and the fall of the Vākāṭakas, it is possible that these figures represent the Aśmaka ruler and his entourage who played a key role in bringing an end to Hariṣeṇa's power in the region. Their impressive and portrait-like appearance might explain the absence of inscriptions in Aurangabad cave 3. These princely patrons would have left behind powerful evidence of their donation in these figures placed eternally in devotion, functioning as perennial producers of merit. These figures perform in visual terms a function comparable to that of a written *praśasti*.[57]

One could hypothesize that an epigraph, now obliterated, was painted or inscribed in cave 3 by its donors, but the lack of inscriptions at Aurangabad is not at all abnormal for the time. Votive inscriptions were commonly found in early Buddhist caves to commemorate gifts by individuals and communities, but the practice of inscribing on the monument itself appears to have become less common during the fifth century. It is precisely at this time that all across India ordinary communities ceased to be involved in the patronage of religious monuments, and kings and powerful landlords became major supporters of religious institutions.[58] With the decentralization of power that followed the collapse of the Gupta-Vākāṭaka system in India, grants of land revenues destined for religious institutions were the dominant modes of 'giving'[59] and therefore eliminated some of the more personal and direct involvement in the gifts that many earlier Buddhist inscriptions record. As the patterns of donation became more institu-

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[57] Rock-cut images functioning as visual *praśastis* have been discussed by Michael Rabe (1997) in the context of Pallava art. In contrast, Wood (2004) has interpreted the *praśasti* in cave 17 at Ajanta as a visual object.

[58] A notable exception is the 436 CE inscription of the Mandasor guild of weavers mentioned above, responsible for financing a temple dedicated to Sūrya. Thapar (1992, 31) has highlighted the implications of this somewhat exceptional community donation.

[59] The first century CE inscriptions by Nahapāna and Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi in caves 3 and 10 at Nasik demonstrate that this practice started early in India. However, it was during the Gupta-Vākāṭaka period, with the institution of more defined relationships between the king and the local feudatories or subsidiary rulers (*sāmantas*), that the grants of land to religious institutions became common, as they introduced another nexus in the complex relationship between the overlord and the local territory. Records of these grants, generally to Brahmins or their temples, such as the *agrahāra* (gift of rent-free land or village) or the *brahmadeya* (tax-exempt gifts of land), were all recorded on copperplate in the Vākāṭaka period. These grants of land introduced enough centripetal force into the system to weaken the large dynastic houses, which eventually came to an end, and independent regional kingdoms emerged (Thapar 2002, 291–93).

tionalized, the votive epigraphs turned into official documents to be recorded on copperplate and not on walls of edifices: the epigraphs from Hariṣeṇa's entourage at Ajanta are among the last Buddhist gifts to be inscribed for eternity in caves, with the exception of the Kanheri caves in Konkan.[60] Only occasionally do we find patron inscriptions in the later Buddhist and Hindu rock-cut temples excavated in the western Deccan between the seventh and the eighth centuries, a time when regional kingdoms dominated the political arena; the same is true for most of the rock-cut temples excavated in the eastern Deccan by the Cālukyas. While Ajanta perpetuated earlier patronage traditions, the caves at Aurangabad display the tremendous power achieved by the local aristocracy after the dismantling of the Gupta-Vākāṭaka system. The princely patrons of Aurangabad cave 3, as they opened the door to a new order, introduced portraits of themselves in the most sacred of places, using the visual arts and not the written word as a public testament of their power. In this new fragmented and competitive world, art became even more a vehicle of political affirmation.

The presence of life-size sculpted images of the actual patrons functioned to establish a continuum between the secular world of the royalty and that of the Tathāgata. Unlike the smaller images of monks and lay devotees from the Vākāṭaka caves at Ajanta and Ghatotkacha, the princely figures in Aurangabad 3, likely Aśmakas, bring the king and his entourage close to the Buddha, in his own world, in the holiest of places. Behind the direct juxtaposition of the Buddha and the king in Aurangabad cave 3 we can also discern a subtle reference to the interplay between the kingly nature of the Buddha and the divine nature of the king. Recall that in the Vākāṭaka inscription of cave 17 at

[60] At Kanheri the latest rock-cut inscriptions are in Pahlavi and date to the eleventh century (Gokhale 1991, 142–43; Cereti, Olivieri and Vazhutanapally 2002). Inscriptions on rock have advantages over those on copperplate because they are public and last for eternity. The Guptas inscribed their *praśastis* or eulogies on rock surfaces such as pillars and boulders, or in caves in the case of Udayagiri (Fleet 1888). In contrast, all the Vākāṭaka inscriptions are on copperplate, with the exceptions of those by Hariṣeṇa's entourage at Ghatotkacha and Ajanta, and of two inscriptions by Vyaghrādeva, a Vākāṭaka feudatory, from Ganj and Nachna in Madhya Pradesh (Mirashi, 1963b, 92). Both inscriptions were done in the second part of the fifth century, when the Gupta-Vākāṭaka order was on the verge of collapse. Perhaps the political instability of the times encouraged these rulers to leave visible and long-lasting testimony of their power in rock-cut inscriptions, much as the great Guptas had done (Mirashi 1963b). The Ajanta and Ghatotkacha inscriptions also stand out because they are written entirely in verse rather than prose, and only in Sanskrit. Inscriptions from the Vatsagulma branch generally include some Prakrit words.

Ajanta the Buddha is referred as *munirāja* or king of ascetics (Mirashi 1963b, 127, verse 24).

This *tête à tête* alludes to the concept that both the Buddha and the king are *cakravartins*. Even if the local ruler did not fit the profile of the greatest *cakravartin* of all times, Aśoka, the Buddhist literature of this period of political fragmentation seems to contain the notion that different gradations of *cakravartins* could exist, based on the size of their kingdoms and on the means they used to expand it. In the *Abhidharmakośa* by Vasubandhu, a text attributed to the late fourth to fifth century and possibly compiled in north India (Willemen et al. 1998, 241), four kinds of *cakravartins* are listed: the golden, the silver, the copper, and the iron (Vallée Poussin 1923–25, 197 and 202). This Buddhist compendium possibly reflects the fifth century arena in which emerging local rulers, such as the patrons of Aurangabad cave 3, became the new Buddhist elite in need of legitimatization.

It is unclear whether the king and his entourage at Aurangabad are depicted in the act of performing a gift-giving ceremony specifically designated for royalty, or if they are just intent in an ordinary act of devotion such as offering a garland to the Buddha.[61] The presence of secular figures in the holiest of places raises an important question about the degree of public access granted to the laity in these caves. The prominence given to lay images inside the shrine of cave 3 and the fact that so few monastic cells existed at Aurangabad would seem to indicate that, much as in the earliest phase of patronage, the caves continued to cater more to the laity than to monastic members of the Buddhist community. Remarkably, the ritual involvement of the royal group seem to imply the notion of *darśana*: the king keeps his head up, in the direction of the Buddha, his eyes wide open to see the Buddha and be seen. There has always been some hesitancy in recognizing that the practice of *darśana*, generally associated with Hindu devotional ritual, was widely established in the Buddhist world early on. However the reliefs carved on the *vedikā* pillars of the Bharhut *stūpa* indicate

[61] One of the main Buddhist celebrations associated with kingship that we know of is the quinquennial festival described in the *Aśokāvadāna*. (Strong 1989, 265–66). The festival became an elaborate celebration in the medieval period, with the king taking on the appearance of a monk during the offering ceremony. This exchange of insignia between the Buddha and the ruler is depicted at Bamiyan in the niche of the 38-metre-tall Buddha (Klimburg-Salter 1989, 124). However, it is unlikely that this particular celebration is depicted in Aurangabad cave 3, where the donors are represented in their princely attire.

that in the first century BCE this was the way devotees approached the Buddha. A notable example is the depiction of the *nāga* Elāpatra story on the south gate pillar, where the princely entourage of the *nāgarāja* is engaged in precisely the same kind of Buddha worship or *darśana* as the Aurangabad donors (Brancaccio 2005, 'The Making of a Life').

Buddhist texts from *Theravāda* to *Mahāyāna* also allude to the conceptual identification of seeing with worshipping. Performing *darśana* can produce benefits equal to the practice of the *dharma*, as highlighted by the story in the *Aśokāvadāna* in which just by seeing an enlightened being Upagupta will ensure a better rebirth (Strong 1989). In the fully *Mahāyāna* ideology the notion of seeing the Buddha is often taken to a more transcendental level at which the vision becomes a physical and mental experience; the elaborations on vision or *darśana* by the Buddhist philosopher Bhāvaviveka in the sixth century indicate that this practice was well established by that time (Eckel 1993, 139). As noted by McMahan (2002, 158), visualizations become so important in *Mahāyāna* because they are perceived as inner *darśanas* where all separation between the viewer and the object of contemplation is removed. It should be noted that in the so-called intrusive Buddhist images commissioned by individuals in the western Deccan caves during the end of the fifth or sixth century it became a convention to represent kneeling devotees in the act of gazing at the Buddha (figs. 26, 27).

3.5 Aurangabad and the Gupta-Vākāṭaka Idiom

The three-dimensional quality of the princely devotees in Aurangabad cave 3 that makes the figures emerge so boldly from the rock and realistically, has very few antecedents in the Indian world. In the sculpture of the Gupta period there was a growing trend towards representing figures in high relief. Some of the distinctive features of the Aurangabad devotees can be found at Udayagiri near Sanchi, in Madhya Pradesh. There a few Hindu caves were excavated by the entourage of the Gupta king Candragupta at the beginning of the fifth century. Udayagiri cave 6 is dominated by a panel depicting Varāha trampling the cosmic snake and accompanied by a myriad of *ṛṣis* and other divine personages witnessing the event. One character in this tableau stands out in its realistic quality and three-dimensionality, a princely figure kneeling towards Varāha. This image projects from

the relief so much that it ends up by crossing the boundaries of the composition and entering the viewer's world. An inscription on the outer wall of the cave tells us that this sculptural composition was the gift of a *mahārāja* of the Sanakānīka who meditated at the feet of the glorious Candragupta (Fleet 1888, 25). Asher (1983, 53–66) has proposed that the Udayagiri 6 tableau should be interpreted as a political and historical allegory in which Viṣṇu Varāha is none other than the king Candragupta himself (see also Williams 1982, 45). If this is true, then the kneeling image of the prince would be that of the Sanakānīka *mahārāja*, the local ruler who meditates at the feet of the overlord Candragupta. This three-dimensional depiction of the *mahārāja* image therefore constitutes, visually and conceptually, a precedent worthy of note for the princely devotees in the sanctum of Aurangabad cave 3.

The artists who worked at Aurangabad at the end of the fifth century were well versed in the Gupta idiom. The decorations of the pillars in Aurangabad cave 3 with the exuberant *pūrṇaghaṭas* are reminiscent of the Gupta artistic vocabulary, as are the doorway decoration and the plasticity of the sculpted figures. These Gupta-like forms came to Aurangabad from Ajanta, having been already manipulated and transformed there by capable artists who experimented on the living rock. While this is well known, very little attention has been placed on the reverse of this phenomenon, in which idioms developed in the Ajanta range may have had an impact over later monuments attributed to the Guptas. For example, some visual and design elements of cave 3 at Aurangabad display surprising similarities with images and ornamental patterns found in the now ruined Pārvatī temple at Nachna-Kuthara in Madhya Pradesh (fig. 117), dated by Williams (1982, 105–12) to ca. 488–500 CE. Figures carved on a window of the Pārvatī temple (Ibid., fig. 151) are reminiscent of the larger *bodhisattva* sculptures in the Aurangabad cave 3 shrine (fig. 37). The temple portal, although in certain aspects it does not follow the mainstream form of earlier Gupta portals, bears similarities to the shrine doorway at Aurangabad cave 3 (Ibid., 109–19). The carvings of *gaṇas* playing musical instruments (fig. 119) recall the *gaṇas* embellishing Aurangabad caves 3 and 1 (figs. 33, 14). Williams also notes that the outer door of the temple was flanked by pillars and that more *gaṇa* figures must have once embellished the outside of this temple in a configuration that, *mutatis mutandis*, would echo the porch of Aurangabad cave 1 (fig. 11). Finally, a *tīrthaṁkara* image from the nearby cave of Siddh-ka Pahar (fig. 118) is strikingly evocative of the main Buddha images at Aurangabad cave 3

(fig. 37) and Ajanta cave 1 (fig. 116). Useful epigraphic evidence helps to explain these marked affinities. In two Ucchakalpa rock inscriptions found at Nachna and in the neighboring locality of Ganj, the local king Vyāghradeva, who was in power sometime between 470 and 490 CE, declared his allegiance to the Vākāṭaka king Pṛthvīṣeṇa. While these epigraphs do not prove that the Vākāṭakas were in total control of the Nachna region, they do imply close relationships between the local elite and the Vākāṭaka milieu (Bakker 1997, 47–48). Thus it is possible that as patronage at Ajanta faded, unemployed artists sought new patrons among the regional elites formerly allied with the Vākāṭakas. Perhaps some sculptors ended up working on the Pārvatī temple at Nachna while others were employed locally to complete the interior of Aurangabad cave 3 and to begin the porch of cave 1. The rich sculptural decoration characteristic of both the Pārvatī temple at Nachna and the Buddhist caves 1 and 3 at Aurangabad seems to have roots in the Vākāṭaka-Gupta idiom elaborated at Ajanta.[62] This does not mean that the artistic languages of Aurangabad cave 3 and the Pārvatī temple at Nachna are identical, but rather that they represent different developments of a common artistic tradition. Realized at a time when the Guptas and the Vākāṭakas were in crisis, both these monuments embody the centripetal force that led to the disintegration of the 'empires'. Some elements observed in Nachna can also be related to formulas employed in the eastern parts of the Vākāṭaka empire; for example, a *nāga* image (now in the Mahādeva temple at Nachna; fig. 120) from the Pārvatī temple echoes well-known Vākāṭaka sculptures of Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa from the site of Paunar in Maharashtra (fig. 121).[63]

While the eastern Vākāṭaka idiom may have had an impact on some of the late fifth century art from central Madhya Pradesh, the Buddhist caves in the Ajanta-Aurangabad region linked to Hariṣeṇa and his entourage display a distinctive visual idiom.[64] How are we to

[62] Even the image of a foreigner pouring wine into a rhyton, once embellishing the Pārvatī temple, distantly echoes the Central Asian figures painted on the Ajanta walls. Williams (1982, 108, fig. 153) explains this image as 'an amusing comment on the invading Huṇās'.

[63] For Nachna see Williams (1982, 108, fig. 152); for Paunar see Bakker (1997, 157–59, pl. XL).

[64] Bakker (1997, 44–45) discusses some of the stylistic connections that can be traced between Hindu sculptural remains from the site of Ramagiri and some of the sculpture from Ajanta. The large guardian figures carved on the façade of the Ajanta 26 *caitya*

explain this notable difference? The location of the Buddhist caves on the Ajanta range and at the gateway of Malwa is vital to answering this question. Bagh, Ajanta, Ghatotkacha, and Aurangabad were in a cultural and economic orbit completely different from the Vākāṭaka centers in Vidarbha. The life of these cave sites was contingent on long-distance movement of people and things. For example, Ajanta and Aurangabad are in the proximity of the Ghats along the north-south routes directed towards Malwa, a region that was historically the gateway to the Gangetic valley and to the northwest of the Subcontinent crossed by major trade routes. This fact explains why visual idioms coming from the north appear to have played a major role in the formulation of artistic languages at Ajanta and Aurangabad, while the artistic traditions from eastern regions like Vidārbha are relatively underrepresented. Even if the Ajanta cave 16 inscription celebrates Hariṣeṇa's links to Kalinga, Kosala, and Andhra, it appears that artists working at Ajanta in the fifth century did not elaborate much from the Buddhist repertoire of Andhra Pradesh.[65]

3.6 Aurangabad and the Northwest of the Indian Subcontinent

Connections between the western Deccan and the Buddhist sites in the northwest, in the ancient region of Gandhara, should not surprise us, as the Ajanta range area in the fifth century developed a visual language that referred obviously to the northern regions of the Indian Subcontinent. Gandhara, which extended from modern-day eastern Afghanistan to Pakistan, had become a prominent Buddhist center between the second and fourth centuries CE. In fact, Chinese monastic pilgrims like Fa Xian thought that this region was the true homeland of Buddhism (Kuwayama 2006, 107). Hundreds of monasteries had been built in Gandhara during these centuries, and a network

hall appear to be related to a well-known image of Śiva from Mansar, recently identified as being a *nidhi* (R. Brown 2004, 59). A *gaṇa* image from the Kevala Narasiṃha temple on Ramagiri Hill also recalls the figures carved on the façade of Ajanta cave 26 (Williams 1982, 187). However, the Ajanta caves overall employ a visual language that was certainly not formulated in the eastern parts of the Vākāṭaka kingdom.

[65] Weiner (1977, 103) has argued that the Buddha images flanking the entrance of Ajanta cave 19 recall Buddha images from 'the Krishna valley' and that some of the Ajanta paintings show an influence from that region.

of sacred sites had developed there; some of the concepts and forms developed in Gandhara seem to have trickled down to the Deccan plateau as a new wave of Buddhist patronage washed over this area in the fifth century. For example, many *avadāna* narratives represented in the Ajanta paintings have been directly linked to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*, a code redacted in northwest India, possibly in the first century of the Common Era (Schlingloff 1988).[66] Epigraphical evidence from Ajanta analyzed by Cohen (2000) also shows that *mūlasarvāstivādins*, or monks following this particular *vinaya*, established themselves in the western Deccan.

A passage of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* captures the atmosphere of the rock-cut sites in the western Deccan:

> Well maintained was that *vihāra*, and sited in a lovely isolated spot adorned with all sorts of trees, filled with the sound of geese and curlews, peacocks and parrots, mynahs and cuckoos, adorned with various flowers and fruits. Once a wealthy trader spent the night in that *vihāra.* When he saw the beauty of that *vihāra* and the beauties of its woods, he was deeply moved, and although he had not seen the monks, he dispatched in the name of the Community a very considerable donation.'[67]

The words recorded by the monk donor Buddhabadra, the patron of Ajanta cave 26 echo the *vinaya*:

> This (cave) temple has been established for the welfare of…, on the top of a mountain, which is frequented by great *yogins*, and the valleys of which are resonant with the chirping of birds and the chattering of monkeys.…[68]

The beauty of monastic sites was a factor often highlighted in Buddhist texts. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* states that simple—or, more plainly, ugly—monastic structures should be adorned with spectacular paintings. Appropriate locations for specific painted themes are also given. In many cases these reflect what we see at Ajanta: the Great Miracle of Shravasti and the Wheel of Rebirth in the porch, and the garland of *jātakas* in the gallery (Schopen 2004, 35). The attractiveness

[66] On the possible date and location of the compilation of the *Mūlasarvāstivada vinaya* see Schopen (2004, 2 and 22).

[67] Passage from the *Cīvaravastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivada vinaya* from Dutt (1942, 107.11), translated in Schopen (2004, 33).

[68] This is the rather poetic translation of the Ajanta cave 26 inscription published by Spink (2005, 420).

of a Buddhist religious complex apparently was not just dictated by pure aesthetic considerations, it was necessary to ensure the continuation of patronage. A *Vibhaṅga* passage translated by Schopen (2004, 42) shows how this worked. Traveling merchants

> . . . saw *vihāras* that had high arched gateways, were ornamented with windows, latticed windows, and railings, *vihāras* that captivated the eye and the heart and were like stairways to heaven, and they were deeply affected. They went to a *vihāra* and said to the monks: 'Noble Ones, we would make an offering feast for the Community!'

Statements by Hariṣeṇa's minister Varāhadeva in his inscription from cave 16 at Ajanta sound somewhat similar. Verse 24 of the epigraph praises the *vihāra* 'which is adorned with windows, doors, beautiful picture galleries, ledges, statues of the nymphs of Indra and the like, which is ornamented by beautiful pillars and stairs . . .'. Verse 22 of the same epigraphs states that Varāhadeva '. . . caused to be made this excellent dwelling to be occupied by the best of ascetics', emphasizing that not only did he sponsor the cave, but he also provided funds to support monks living in it, thus committing himself to total patronage of the *vihāra* to make sure that the cave would be actually inhabited. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* explains that the donation of a monastic residence alone does not generate merit unless monks inhabit it, thus perpetuating the rewards of the gift (Schopen 2004, 31).[69]

As the knowledge of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* possibly came to the Deccan from the northwest, perhaps some of the innovations we see in fifth century monastic architecture in the western Deccan had counterparts in the Gandharan Buddhist tradition. The most striking novelty of Buddhist rock-cut sites in the western Deccan is the introduction of a large seated Buddha image in a monastic cell located on axis with the *vihāra* entrance.

At the beginning of the Common Era, newly developed anthropomorphic images of the Buddha were always placed in sacred areas near relic *stūpas* (Behrendt 2005). This was certainly the case of Gandhara, Andhra Pradesh, and possibly Mathura. The question, then, is when Buddha images started to become independent cult objects in monasteries. Images for worship have been found in cells of

[69] Schopen translates passages of this *vinaya* in which donors are encouraged to donate for the repairs of the monastery, so that monks could continue to live in it.

quadrangular monasteries in Gandhara.[70] However it was probably around the third century, when Buddhist monasticism thrived in the region, that shrines for images began to be introduced in the residential areas. A good example of this trend is the makeover of cell 8 in the Jaulian monastery (Behrendt 2004, 170). Thus it is conceivable that the practice of installing devotional images in monasteries originated in Gandhara and then trickled towards the Deccan plateau, where it was transformed and perfected. This practice probably reached the Deccan with monks moving along the routes, via Ujjain and Malwa, that linked these two distant areas.

In this light, it is no surprise that some peculiar iconographic solutions adopted at Bagh have a counterpart in the greater Gandhara region (Weiner 1977, 48). Bagh is a Vākāṭaka cave site by the river Tapi in a key position bridging Malwa and the western Deccan, adjacent to the main roads directed towards the northwest. In describing the layout of the sanctum of Bagh cave 2, Weiner suggests that this unique combination of *stūpa* shrine cum antechamber with large Buddha images carved on either side could be found only in the *stūpa* court at Tapa Shotor in Hadda in the fourth century.[71] Even the impressive life-size images carved by devotees in the shrine of Aurangabad cave 3 have counterparts in the plastic art from Hadda. In the same *stūpa* court at Tapa Shotor is the so-called Aquatic Niche, which houses clay *nāgas* and devotees, carved in the round, that emerge from the back wall of the structure in a fashion similar to that of the figures in the Aurangabad cave 3 shrine (fig. 122).[72] It should also be noted that in the shrine antechamber of cave 3 a large bodhisattva figure with atten-

[70] An *in situ* Buddhist narrative relief was found in cell 2 of the Jaulian monastery near Taxila, and several portable metal images have surfaced in Gandharan monasteries. A bronze *bodhisattva* sculpture was found in the Jaulian monastery, a copper *bodhisattva* in Akhauri B, and a copper Buddha in Shah-ji-ki-dheri (Behrendt 2004, 36). From the account of Xuan Zang we know that Gandharan monasteries were as ornate as those carved in the rock of the western Deccan during the fifth century CE (Beal 1906, 74).

[71] However, it should be remembered that the *vihāras* at Bagh do not include an image of the seated Buddha in the axial cell.

[72] On the 'Aquatic Niche' see Tarzi (2005). The results from the excavations of Tapa Shotor have been critically reviewed by Kuwayama, who also notes a unique feature present at the site: two chapels at the southwest corner of the *stūpa* court are covered with a barrel vault. True barrel vaults are not found in any of the Buddhist monuments of Gandhara except for the rock-cut site of Basawal in the Jalalabad area and in eastern Afghanistan. At this site a large number of residential cells with barrel-vaulted ceilings have been found (Kuwayama 2002, 93). Perhaps this barrel-vault cell model

dant, probably made of stucco like the Hadda statuary, must have been plugged on the rear wall to the right of the shrine where large square sockets still survive.

The similar visual atmospheres created by three-dimensional sculptural assemblages in these two Buddhist shrines located so far away from each other may not be purely coincidental. There are indications that these two major Buddhist groups were not so isolated at the beginning of the fifth century: a movement of Buddhist monks in this period may have facilitated the exchange of ideas. On the basis of a study of the first three chapters of the *Gaoseng zhuan*, a Chinese account compiled in 518 CE of biographies of eminent monks who established Buddhism in China, Kuwayama (2008) has shown that during the fourth and fifth centuries a significant number of Indian monks traveled from India to China via the greater Gandharan region. According to the literary accounts, most of these monks going to China resided at some point in eastern Afghanistan, an area where major Buddhist monasteries of this period are clearly documented. A good example is the account by the monk Dhārmakṣema, originally from central India, who was responsible for the translation of the *Mahaparinirvāṇa sūtra* in Khotan in 421. The movement of Indian monks seems to have continued well into the sixth century. The *Tang gaoseng zhuan*, includes, for example, the biography of Dhārmagupta, a monk who was originally from Lata, the area between the lower course of the Narmada and Tapi rivers, who traveled to Taxila and beyond to China. These accounts, preserved in Chinese texts, of illustrious Indian monks indicate that in the fifth and sixth centuries there was a major Buddhist conduit between the greater Gandhara region and western India.

In the latter half of the fifth century, the so-called Hūṇas from the northwest descended upon the western parts of the Indian Subcontinent, inflicting a deadly blow to Gupta hegemony. They appear to have belonged to the lineage of the Alchon Huns, who had earlier occupied parts of Afghanistan and northern Pakistan and had expanded into Punjab before reaching north India.[73] The Gupta king Skandagupta in his Bitari pillar inscriptions dating approximately to

came from India; barrel-vault cells are found in the early rock-cut caves at Pitalkhora, for example.

[73] For an overview of epigraphic and numismatic evidence regarding the Hūṇas and their origin, see Errington and Curtis (2007, 96–98).

456 or 457 claims to have defeated an unnamed Hūṇa ruler, but by the time Toramāṇa was in power (ca. 485–515 CE), the Hūṇas had gained control of large parts of north India. That these foreign rulers extended their sphere of influence first to the region of Malwa, the gateway to the western Deccan, precisely at the time when the Buddhist caves in the Ajanta region were excavated should not be overlooked (Errington and Curtis 2007).[74]

Historiography has generally associated the Hūṇas with irreversible destabilization and decline, but the intensity of patronage and activity at Buddhist monuments in areas that the Hūṇas overran indicates otherwise. For example, the Hūṇa penetration into northern Gujarat and the hostilities with the Guptas might have only temporarily disturbed the supply of Indian goods to the Gujarati ports, and the Vākāṭaka inscriptions from Bagh or Ajanta do not record terrible destruction. A study of archaeological material from Sind (Lohuizen de Leeuw 1979) has shown that sea trade in that region and Buddhism continued almost undisturbed under the Huns.[75] Kuwayama (2002) has also convincingly demonstrated that under a group of Huns identified as Hephtalites many Buddhist sites in Afghanistan carried on their activities despite decreased economic activity. The presence of Huns loosely controlling a vast territory extending from Afghanistan to Khotan and western India at the end of the fifth century, right at the time when work at caves 1, 3, and 4a at Aurangabad was under way, contributed to facilitating communication and exchange among major Buddhist communities located in the northwest, along the Silk Road, and in western India.[76] This assumption is corroborated by the movement of Buddhist monks from and to China at this time. Perhaps we should consider the Hūṇas cited in the Indian inscriptions in a new perspective:

[74] On the basis of the literary account of the *Daśakumāracarita*, Spink (1982, 271) proposed that the Hūṇas were well established in Malwa in the latter half of the fifth century and that the father of the Hūṇa ruler Toramāṇa may have married a Malwa princess.

[75] See also Kuwayama (1984) and Liu (1988, 32). We should remember that at the end of the fifth century a Buddhist originally from Sind was a major donor at Kanheri.

[76] The center of the Hun-Hephtalite power was in Tokharistan in northeastern Afghanistan, however there is no general agreement on the specific location of their headquarters (Kuwayama 2002). The Huns-Hephtalites took control of Khotan in 498 CE (Thierry 1993).

not as a disruptive force in the Indian Subcontinent, but rather as builders of cultural bridges between Gandhara and the western Deccan at the very end of the sixth century CE.[77]

The artists who worked on the fifth century Buddhist caves in the Ajanta range appear to have been well aware of the Gandharan artistic idiom. An indication of this important connection comes from the sites of Pitalkhora and Ajanta. The early *caitya* hall 5 at Pitalkhora and *caitya* hall 10 at Ajanta were refurbished with new fifth century paintings, and the pillars were all embellished with images of the Buddha. Among them the painters included images that depict sculptural examples of Gandharan Buddhas (fig. 123). These Buddha figures stand out from the dominant Gupta types because the folds of their robes are carefully rendered with a pattern of curving black lines; even the garments of these Buddhas are painted in grey, as if the artists had in mind the Buddhist schist sculpture so distinctive in Gandharan production.

Recent archaeological discoveries in Pakistan conclusively show the strong links existing between these two distant Buddhist regions during the fifth century. At the site of Jinan Wali Dheri near Taxila, Pakistani archaeologists have discovered fragments of wall paintings that are strikingly close in style to those embellishing the Ajanta caves (Ashraf Khan and Mahmood-ul Hasan 2004). Unfortunately the paintings from Jinan Wali Dheri are very incomplete, and no other wall paintings survive from that area. Yet even from such limited visual evidence one can see that in the 5th century the painters who worked at Ajanta and those who worked in Gandhara elaborated upon a shared idiom. However it is impossible to say where this particular painting tradition may have originated. It should also be mentioned that the paintings from Jinan Wali Dheri were originally placed on the side walls of a monastery, in a location that is consistent with that of the Ajanta paintings.

[77] In some ways the Hūṇas brought Gandhara closer to the western Deccan region, much as the western Kṣatrapas had done centuries earlier. What Falk (2006, 168) noted, in general terms, about early foreign dynasties in India could be applied to the Hūṇas as well. Such groups always 'display an extroverted attitude; they have contacts with foreign rulers, they deal in large scale with foreign economies'.

3.7 The Buddha in the Monasteries at Aurangabad and Ajanta

While some architectural and artistic features found in the fifth century Buddhist caves of the western Deccan may be traced back to Gandhara, most of what we see in these rock-cut complexes is entirely the product of local elaboration. Image shrines within monastic enclosures may have appeared first in Gandhara, but only in the Ajanta area did images of large seated Buddhas become the main focus of monastic spaces. In Gandharan monasteries image shrines were never aligned with entrances to the courtyards of the buildings, and they were not intended to be the focal point of the monastic residential buildings. However, every cave in Ajanta and Aurangabad had a large seated Buddha image in an axial shrine generally preceded by an antechamber. On the basis of an extremely thorough study of architectural transformations at the Ajanta caves, Spink (2005) has suggested that the earliest shrine with an axial focus was introduced in 466 and that caves excavated at an earlier time, between 462 and 465, were not originally intended to include an axial unit. He also proposed that in the beginning shrines were intended just to house *stūpas* and that subsequently Buddha images were introduced in *vihāras*.[78] In the western Deccan there occurred a very important transformation of the monastic space: the *vihāras* were not simple places for monks to reside in but were conceptually turned into special Buddhist realms. The epigraphic evidence from Ajanta demonstrates that this innovation was framed in such terms that there was unbroken continuity between the early tradition, in which the *caitya* and the residential quarters were separated, and the fifth century caves, where the *caitya* existed as a cult object both in apsidal halls and in *vihāras*.

The terms used in the Vākāṭaka inscriptions at Ajanta to designate the new caves tell us a great deal about how the new sacred spaces were conceived at the time. In cave 16, which is configured like a 'classic' *vihāra* with a square central court and cells on the three sides, the votive inscription by Hariṣeṇa's minister Varāhadeva contains a series of terms that highlight the cultic function of this monastic residential unit. In verse 31 the cave is said to be a *maṇḍapa*, or pillared

[78] Spink (2009, 36) suggests the date of 469 for the introduction of the Buddha images in *vihāras*.

hall, and in verse 24 it is said to include a *caityamaṇḍir*, likely referring to the axial shrine with the Buddha image placed in it. The word *maṇḍir* seems to be used in the sense of palace, and it is repeated in verse 27 of the same inscription, where the cave is equated to the *surendramaṇḍir* or palace of Indra, lord of the gods. Verse 27 celebrates cave 16 '…[Which resembles] the palaces of the lord of the gods and is similar to a cave in the lovely Mandara mountain…', a description that emphasizes the celestial nature of this cave and its cosmic centrality, located on Mount Meru, at the nexus of a heavenly realm. The metaphor used to describe cave 16 as the palace of Indra on Mount Meru echoes the Buddhist cosmography included in the *Abhidharmakośa*, a Buddhist *Sarvāstivāda* text composed in the fifth century or earlier by the Gandharan Vasubandhu (Willemen et al. 1998, 270). Chapter 3 of the *Abhidharmkośa* describes in detail the system: on the summit of Mount Meru is the residence of the thirty-three gods in Indra's city, and Indra's beautiful palace is at the very centre of this heavenly mountain (Vallée Poussin 1923–26, 2, 50–58, 145–48). Perhaps small sculpted palaces or *maṇḍirs* appear on friezes and portals in caves such as Ajanta cave 26 or Aurangabad cave 3 because they are key motifs to recreate the setting of a heavenly city, the appropriate space for the Buddha to reside, rather than just simple decorations.

In the inscription from Ajanta cave 16 the juxtaposition of the expressions *caityamaṇḍir* in verse 24 to *surendramaṇḍir* in verse 27 suggests that much as *surendra* was used as a synonym for Indra, the lord of the gods, the word *caitya* was used as a synonym for the Buddha. The particular use of the term *caitya maṇḍir* in the fifth century confirms what I have suggested earlier in this volume, that the term *caitya* implies the presence of the Buddha, whether associated with an aniconic or an iconic context. Around the beginning of the Common Era the word *caitya* was used to designate *stūpa*-like structures carved in apsidal halls. Such aniconic *caityas* were emblematic of the persona of the Buddha present in those structures. In the fifth century the presence of the Buddha was unambiguously associated with his physical image, and thus iconic *caityas* were included in the monastic caves. Indeed every *vihāra* included a place for the Buddha to reside. The conceptual continuity that devotees must have perceived between iconic and aniconic *caityas* and between *stūpa*-like monuments and Buddha images is well illustrated by the example of *vihāra* 3 at Nasik. On the back wall of this monastic residential cave, on axis with the entrance, an image of a *stūpa*-like monument was placed in exactly the same

position that the Buddha would be placed in the shrine in the fifth century *vihāras*.

The notion that the Buddha was conceived as a presence in the fifth century caves at Ajanta and at Aurangabad has been brilliantly demonstrated by Schopen (1997, 260). He has shown that many votive inscriptions dating to the fifth and sixth centuries refer to the Buddha as if the owner of the monastery with terms akin to those used in ownership transactions.[79] Schopen (1997, 261–73) has also suggested that the main cell where the Buddha image was placed in the *vihāras* may be identified with the *gandhakuṭī* or perfurmed chamber of the Buddha. However, it appears that in Ajanta and possibly in the western Deccan, the term *gandhakuṭī* may not always have been used to designate image shrines carved in monastic residences.

Strong (1977, 391) explains the term *gandhakuṭī* as referring to the locus of the Buddha in devotional terms and informs us that this word is often mentioned in Pāli commentaries and Sanskrit *avadānas* but not in canonical texts or major *sūtras*. The term *gandhakuṭī* is also found in an inscription from cave 17 at Ajanta. The opening verse of this inscription unambiguously labels the cave as a *vihāra* or monastic residence, while verse 24 of the same inscription labels the cave a *maṇḍapa* containing the *caitya* of the king of ascetics (*munirāja)*. In verse 27 of the same cave 17 epigraph, the word *gandhakuṭī* appears in an unclear context. Mirashi (1963, 129 n.5) argues that in this instance the term does not refer to the Buddha shrine located in the *vihāra* itself, previously identified as being the '*caitya* of the king of ascetics (*munirāja*)', but rather to the adjacent apsidal cave 19 commissioned by the same Vākāṭaka patron. This interpretation is also strongly supported by Spink (2005, 418, footnote 13), who says, 'The reference is undoubtedly to the Chaitya cave XIX which actually lies to the west of cave XVII'. If the interpretative line suggested by Mirashi and corroborated by Spink is accepted, then it would appear that at Ajanta the word *gandhakuṭī*, or perfumed chamber, was not specifically used to describe the shrine dedicated to the Buddha in the *vihāra*. The epithet may have been used in the more general sense of 'cultic abode' and thus may have been applicable to a variety of worship structures, including *caitya* halls (Strong 1977, 394).

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[79] Schopen (1997, 261) cites as an example a fifth–sixth century copperplate inscription from Bagh.

Gandhakuṭī was, according to the *Nidanakathā*, the name of the main building or hut built as a residence for the Buddha at the center of the Jetavana monastery and surrounded by other monastic dwellings (Strong 1977, 392–93). On a *vedikā* roundel of the Bharhut *stūpa* dating to circa the first century CE, we have the first representation of what the 'perfumed chamber' may have originally looked like. A structure with a so-called *caitya* arch on the façade, perhaps the prototype for all Buddhist *caitya* halls, is unmistakably labeled as '*gandhakuṭī*' (Cunningham 1879, 84–87, pl. 28). According to Strong (1977), the offering of flowers is what characterizes the essence of the *gandhakuṭī*, or perfumed chamber. All the Buddhist stories in which the *gandhakuṭī* is mentioned allude to the fact that the structure was created by devotees for the Buddha. The *Puṛṇāvadāna*, which was surely known in the western Deccan, as it was painted in cave 2 at Ajanta (on the right aisle; Schlingloff 1987, 203), dwells on the notion that the Buddha moves and resides in pavilions magically constituted by flowers thrown in the air by the devotees (Strong 1977, 396). If showers of flowers make a *gandhakuṭī*, then perhaps the imagery in Ajanta *caitya* hall 19 transforms this fifth century cave into a full-fledged *gandhakuṭī*; each pillar leading to the apsidal end of the cave is painted with cascading flowers over series of Buddha images.

That in the western Deccan during the fifth century rock-cut *caitya* halls may have been thought of as *gandhakuṭīs* is also suggested by a votive inscription from Kanheri. This epigraph is inscribed to the left of a colossal Buddha image carved in the veranda of *caitya* hall 3; it states that the Buddha (*Bhagavat*) image (*pratima*) was the gift of the monk Buddhagoṣa, the *mahāgandhakuṭī-vārika* or guardian of the great *gandhakuṭī* (Ghokale, 1991, 52, no. 7).[80] Without a doubt the image in question is the colossal carved Buddha right next to the epigraph, and it is very likely that the *mahāgandhakuṭī* where Buddhagoṣa performed the function of sweeper was actually the *caitya* hall where the image was. It makes sense that Buddhagoṣa would choose to patronize a major sculpture in the porch of a cave that was under his personal charge and not elsewhere at the site. The title of *mahāgandhakuṭī-vārika* appearing in this inscription at Kanheri is relevant if connected to a passage related in *Divyāvadāna* 23 that provides information on

[80] Gokhale translates the term *-vārika* as 'guardian', while Schopen (1997, 284) more literally translates it as 'the one who is in charge'.

what a *gandhakuṭī* is: a structure dedicated not only to Śākyamuni but also to the six past Buddhas, one that includes a *caitya* (perhaps a *stūpa*-like structure or an image?) with a fore area to be regularly swept (Strong 1977, 402). More textual references to *gandhakuṭīs* gathered by Strong (1977, 393) also suggest that such a structure was often linked to monasteries but not necessarily located in the interior of a *vihāra*, a characteristic that would certainly apply to the *caitya* halls carved in the rock-cut monasteries of the western Deccan. It is noteworthy that in the account of the *Puṛṇāvadāna* mentioned above, the *gandhakuṭī* is also referred to as a *prāsāda*, a term used in an early inscription from Bhaja to describe the *caitya* hall. This *avadāna* also describes the *gandhakuṭī* as an environment prepared especially for the people to see the Buddha face to face. As the anthropomorphic image of the Buddha was well established in the fifth century, the public apsidal caves 19 and 26 at Ajanta may have had the function of *gandhakuṭī*, with Buddha images literally emerging from *stūpa*-shaped monuments to be seen and worshiped. Thus, it appears that in the western Deccan rock-cut monuments, the notion of *gandhakuṭī* may have been attached also to rock-cut *caitya* halls that since the beginning had been used as cultic abodes.

In the fifth century the notion of the Buddha as a living entity in monastic complexes emerged very clearly. The Vākāṭaka inscriptions from Ajanta suggest that the Buddha resided in the caves. However, they do not address him as the head monk in the monastery, but rather as the king in the palace or, better, in his heavenly residence, as Varāhadeva's inscription in cave 16 implies. The literary metaphors such as the word *munirāja*, used in Vākāṭaka epigraphs to address the Buddha in *vihāras*, are echoed by the visual metaphors of kingship that surround the presence of the Buddha such as in cave 3 at Aurangabad. This cave is more than a residence hall; it is an elaborate *maṇḍapa* with ornate stone pillars reminiscent of princely halls. The pillars are crowned by series of small edifices carved on the beams; these portray the cave as a celestial urban setting. On the pillar bases and capitals, as well as on the cave portals, images of dallying couples, dancing figures, and musicians recreate a palace atmosphere. The brackets of the four pillars leading to the shrine vestibule of this cave are decorated with *śālabhañjikās* attended by small, dwarfish figures holding sticks. Such characters appear also occasionally in the Ajanta paintings, where they have been identified by Zin (1998) as representing the *vidūṣaka*, the jester of the Sanskrit drama. Their presence in

Aurangabad cave 3 could be explained only if we were to consider this cave as a courtly environment presided over by the princely Buddha. Inside the shrine, the presence of life-size royal devotees at the feet of the Buddha further plays on the ambiguity between the royal and divine nature of the image. The most convincing indication that the Buddha was perceived as a king of the *vihāras* at Ajanta and Aurangabad is the way he appears in the shrines, sitting on an ornate throne in *bhadrāsana*.

The first large-scale Buddhas of this type appeared in the Ajanta *vihāra*s at the end of the fifth century. According to Spink (2007, 391), it was towards the end of the life span of the site (between 477 and 478), when the Aśmaka feudatories had extended their sphere of influence from Aurangabad to Ajanta, that the Buddhas in the *vihāra* shrines were consistently carved in *bhadrāsana*. This position unquestionably alludes to kingship. In the Ajanta paintings kingly protagonists of *jātakas* such as Mahājanaka in cave 1 (left wall) and Viśvantara in cave 17 (left wall) are represented sitting on elaborate thrones in the so-called European fashion when they address public audiences and exercise their royal functions. In Ajanta cave 2, on the left wall, the Buddha appearing as a *bodhisattva* in Tuṣita heaven, prior to his birth as Śākyamuni, also sits on a throne in *bhadrāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā* as he preaches to the gods. In the antechamber to the shrine of Ajanta cave 17, the Buddha is represented in the same way as he is represented preaching in connection with his descent from Trāyastriṃśa heaven (Wood 2004, 135, pl. 9.10). Surprisingly, Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* are not common in Gupta art. The *dhyānāsana* position is preferred even when the Buddha is addressing audiences, such as in the case of the first sermon at Sarnath. However in a stele (now in the Calcutta Museum) from Sarnath depicting scenes of the life of the Buddha, a Buddha in *bhadrāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā* is represented between scenes depicting the enlightenment and *nirvāṇa*. In this panel the Buddha, flanked by two *bodhisattvas*, sits on an elaborate throne, with his feet resting on a lotus flower, and preaches to kneeling figures; this iconographic format is typical of both Ajanta and Aurangabad (Williams 1975, fig. 5). Another example of a *bhadrāsana* Buddha in Gupta style, with a small worshipper at the base of the throne, comes from Sind. This small terracotta image (now in the collection of the Chhitrapati Shivaji Maharaja Vastu Sangrahalaya in Mumbai) is especially interesting because of its provenance: the *stūpa* of Mirpur Khas (fig. 124). Significantly, it shows decorative motifs similar

to the ones seen in the Ajanta caves and Aurangabad cave 3.[81] In earlier Gandharan art only a few isolated instances of the *bhadrāsana* Buddha type exist, and they all seem to date to later phases of Buddhist activity in the region (fig. 125).[82] Generally in the Kuṣāṇa art from the northwest, mostly kings, queens, and deities such as Pāñcika are represented in the so-called European fashion, and occasionally *bodhisattvas*. In the Buddhist reliefs from Amaravati the *bhadrāsana* is also a position associated with kings and princes.[83] Klimburg-Salter (1998, 14), in a study of an eleventh century CE wooden portal of the gSer khang in western Tibet, has shown that existed a convention of representing Śākyamuni in *bhadrāsana* when preaching in the Tuṣita heaven. We may conclude that the *bhadrāsana* tends to be associated with sovereignty and the public address of superior wisdom, whether on this earth or in a heavenly realm. Interestingly, such a 'royal' iconographic type became established in the Ajanta range towards the end of Hariṣeṇa's hegemony in the region, when the Vākāṭaka power faded away and local feudatories, like the Aśmakas in the case of Ajanta and possibly Aurangabad, became the protagonists of the political scene.

In every shrine at Ajanta and Aurangabad,[84] the seated Buddha is always flanked by *bodhisattvas* in a highly iconic triad pattern. In the sanctum of cave 3 at Aurangabad the *bodhisattvas* represented on either side of the Buddha hold fly whisks in their right hands, and their left hands rest on the side of the body (fig. 37). The *bodhisattva* to the left of the Buddha sports a prominent sash tied below his left hip, and he wears a small *stūpa* in his crown. In light of what we see in later iconography, this may explain why the figure has been identified as the *bodhisattva* Maitreya. The *bodhisattva* to the right of the Buddha is most likely Avalokiteśvara, since he has a small *dhyānāsana* Buddha in his headdress.

At Aurangabad an elaborate image of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* is also found in cave 4a in a slightly different context (fig. 45). This cave consists of a small independent chapel carved in the rock adja-

[81] Later votive images in clay depicting a *bhadrāsana* Buddha surrounded by *stūpas* have also been found at Thul Mir Rukhan (Lohuizen de Leeuw 1979, 156–57).

[82] The hairstyle of this rare example of *bhadrāsana* Buddha from Swat now in the British Museum is suggestive of a later date for the piece (Acc. No. OA 1948.10–11.1; Zwalf 1996, I, 90, no. 30).

[83] See for example an Amaravati relief now in the British Museum (Acc. No. BM 77; Knox 1992, 114, fig. 55).

[84] Except for Ajanta cave 17.

cent the early *caitya* hall established at the site. This shrine, which has no *vihāra*, has a large Buddha image seated on an elaborately carved throne similar to those found in the main shrine of Ajanta or in Aurangabad cave 3. The difference here is that this is a shrine type of image without the remaining part of the cave built around it; only two small octagonal pillars carved in front of the image are used to delineate the sacred space (fig. 44). Stylistically, the Buddha in Aurangabad cave 4a is very similar to the main seated image carved on the *stūpa* of the Ajanta 26 apsidal hall (fig. 126). The Buddha image in Aurangabad cave 4a is placed so close to the apsidal hall that it would seem the patrons intended to establish a link between this Buddha image and the *stūpa*-shaped monument in cave 4, echoing the configuration of Ajanta cave 26, where the Buddha image and the *stūpa* appear together. The patrons of Ajanta cave 26 and those of Aurangabad cave 4a may well have been the same people: the Aśmakas, who at the end of the fifth century took over the region where these two cave sites are located. The presence of a unique structure at Aurangabad such as cave 4a suggests that by the end of the fifth century the iconographic format developed in the Ajanta shrines was no longer read as a function of its monastic surroundings—i.e., the Buddha as the head or the king of the community of monks—but rather in a more universal way as a cultic image of the *dharma* king. The *bodhisattvas* on either side of the Buddha at Aurangabad, as well as in the Ajanta shrines, enhance the symbolic aspect of this image type.[85]

3.8 *Mahāyāna* at Aurangabad

Some of the iconographic developments we see at Aurangabad indicate the presence of developed *Mahāyāna* elements in the western Deccan. The emphasis on kingship in Aurangabad cave 3 not only underscores the regality of the local sponsors of the cave, but also encapsulates one of the leitmotifs of early *Mahāyāna* sources: kingship as emblematic of the accomplishment of a goal. For example, in the *Samādhirāja sūtra*, a text that Schopen argues was known in India during the third and fourth centuries CE, because it is often cited in early *śāstric* literature, the Buddha is described as the king of the

[85] Filigenzi (1991, 73) notes that Buddhist triads especially highlight the cosmic centrality of the Buddha.

ārya-pudgala (holy people), and the notion of kingship is often used as a metaphor of qualification for the most accomplished level of practice and practitioners (Schopen 2005, 5; Gomez and Silk 1989, 69). In that text, a devotee awakens by pledging to become a king of *dharma* while the highest *samādhi* obtainable is referred to as the king of *samādhi*, an appellative that gives the title to the text (Gomez and Silk 1989, 11–88).

The popularity of the *dharmacakramudrā* in the shrines of Ajanta and in Aurangabad cave 3 may also indicate the importance of *Mahāyāna* in the area. The *dharmacakramudrā* is a symbolic gesture that simultaneously alludes to the first sermon at Sarnath and to the *Mahāyāna* creed.[86] On a 'historic' level the *dharmacakramudrā* refers to the first teaching of *dharma*. On a 'meta-historic' level, it embodies the fundamental premise of every *Mahāyāna* exposition of faith: the deliverance and transmission of the teaching to an audience; all the *Mahāyāna* sutras open with the expression 'Thus I have heard'.[87] It appears that some of the key elements included in the iconography of the late fifth century caves at Ajanta and Aurangabad may have been intentionally left open to multiple readings and may have functioned at the same time on '*Nikāya*' and *Mahāyāna* levels.

The dominance of the *Mahāyāna* doctrine at Ajanta in the fifth century should not be taken for granted. Schopen (2005) has reminded us that most of the imagery decorating the caves has been linked to sources, such as the *Divyāvadāna* or the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*, that are definitely not part of the *Mahāyāna* textual tradition.[88] Because of the paucity of epigraphic references, he and other eminent scholars have also questioned the popularity of the *Mahāyāna* movement in India before the fifth century. Schopen (2005, 13) has also pointed out that some of the earliest records indicating the presence of *Mahāyāna*, such as the inscription of Gunaighar in Bengal, Jayarampur in Orissa and Devnimori in Gujarat, come from the periphery of the traditional

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[86] Regarding the diffusion of images of the Buddha in *dharmacakramudrā* in Gandhara, Rhi (1991, 185) says, 'The preaching Buddha type, an artistic convention created during the middle of the third century AD as an alternative to independent statues, developed as a dominant form in votive carvings in the late phase of Gandharan art, centered on monasteries at Takht-i-Bahi, Sahri Bahlol and Loriyan Tangai'.

[87] On this opening sentence see Silk (1989). Also see Walser (2005, 153–57).

[88] The only exception to this is a fragment of a painting from cave 10 that Schopen (2005, 278 and 292) identifies as illustrating a passage from the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*.

Buddhist homeland.[89] Contrary to what was previously believed, it appears that *Mahāyāna* in India was a rather marginal tradition whose adherents strived for acceptance during the third, fourth, and even fifth centuries CE.[90] The development of the *bhadrāsana* Buddha in *dharmacakramudrā*, discussed above, as well the occurrence of the term *śākyabhikṣu* in many inscriptions at Ajanta may be taken as signs of the rising but not wholly dominating *Mahāyāna* ideology at Ajanta and related sites.

The Sanskrit term *śākyabhikṣu* in Indian inscriptions has been interpreted, although not without contest, as indicative of *Mahāyāna* (Schopen 2005, 234–46). While Cohen (2000) argues that this term at Ajanta can be taken as a synonym for *bodhisattva*, it nevertheless appears that in the caves this epithet was used with flexibility and that at least one of the *śākyabhikṣus* at Ajanta practiced *Nikāya* Buddhism and was linked to the *Mūlasarvāstivādins*. This evidence, cited by Cohen, is especially interesting when it is compared to Fa Xian's report that *Mahāyāna* and *Hīnayāna* monks shared monasteries in north India when he visited the country in the fifth century.[91] It may be that Ajanta at the time of Hariṣeṇa was in fact a mixed monastery of the type described by the Chinese pilgrim. Schopen (2005, 13–14) also notes that the term *śākyabhikṣu* at Ajanta appears mostly in epigraphs associated with late images that according to Spink would be 'intrusive' or, more appropriately, added to the caves towards the end of the life span of the site, when imperial patronage ceased. If it is true that many of the Ajanta images linked to *śākyabhikṣus* were especially common in the last phase of activity of the caves, when local forces took control of the region, then it would seem that the epigraphic visibility of *Mahāyāna* in the Ajanta range coincides with the end of centralized Vākāṭaka power. This increased visibility occurred with the takeover of regional powers and the patronage of new caves

[89] Walser (2005, 29) notes that outside India on the Silk Road, no *Mahāyāna* manuscripts dating to before the fifth century have been found. The only exceptions are those from Bamiyan in Afganistan.

[90] On the complex nature of *Mahāyāna* see Silk (2002, 399).

[91] On Chinese pilgrims and mixed monasteries, see Walser (2004, 40). Schopen (2005, 239), in agreement with Lamotte (1970), says that until the fourth century *Mahāyāna* was nearly invisible in India because it developed as a movement within already established religious communities. This may well apply to Ajanta, where *Mahāyāna* was present from the beginning but became 'epigraphically' visible only after the end of Hariṣeṇa's patronage.

at Aurangabad. Perhaps the resumption of rock-cutting activities at Aurangabad can be linked not only to the triumph of local politics but also to that of *Mahāyāna* in the Ajanta-Aurangabad area. If *Mahāyāna* elements flowered fully in this inner area of the plateau towards the end of the fifth century, when were the seeds of *Mahāyāna* planted in the region?

Scholars have expressed different opinions on the birthplace of *Mahāyāna*, ranging from the northwestern regions of the Indian Subcontinent to Andhra Pradesh. Wherever the source of this Buddhist movement may have been, the key geographic position of the western Deccan located at the crossroads of these two major areas may have contributed to the diffusion of *Mahāyāna* elements across the rock-cut centers. If Andhra Pradesh was one of the locations of *Mahāyāna*, it is possible that during the late Sātavāhana period, when commercial and political contacts between these two regions were especially strong, such new ideas may have reached the Ajanta-Aurangabad area, to become fully apparent at a later time.[92] It is my impression, however, that the kind of Buddhism we see at sites like Ajanta or Aurangabad had closer ties to that of the northwest of the Indian Subcontinent, as I argued earlier in this chapter. Scholars seem to be leaning increasingly towards the northwestern origin of many *Mahāyāna sūtras*, and perhaps we should consider more seriously the role played by the Huṇā presence in Malwa, the 'backyard' of the western Deccan, during the fifth century as a catalyst for the diffusion of *Mahāyāna* ideas. These foreign rulers, who just at the time when Buddhist patronage revived in the Ajanta area began to bridge a large territory extending from eastern Afghanistan to Khotan, may have provided a direct channel for dissemination of mature *Mahāyāna* ideas from centers like Bamiyan to the caves located on the Deccan plateau in the Ajanta-Aurangabad area.[93]

It is difficult to find a common denominator for the multifaceted *Mahāyāna* ideology since it has been diversely interpreted as

[92] Nāgārjuna, one of the foremost Buddhist figures associated with *Mahāyāna*, was supposedly based in Andhra Pradesh and dedicated his work *Ratnāvalī* to a Sātāvahana ruler (Walser 2004, 25–36).

[93] Bamiyan, in the foothills of the Hindukush in Afghanistan, was a major Buddhist center by the time the cave sites of the Ajanta-Aurangabad region were expanded in the fifth century. A *Mahāyāna* manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāparamitā* from Bamiyan has been dated to as early as the end of the third century (Sander and Waldschmidt 2000).

being monastic or lay, as emphasizing ascetic seclusion or secular practices, and as focusing on the cult of *stūpas* or that of images.[94] Recent scholarship has highlighted especially the finding that several *Mahāyāna sūtras* seem to contain an apology for Buddhist forest retreat. For example, the *Ugraparipṛcchā*, considered among the first and most influential *Mahāyāna sūtras* to be translated from Sanskrit into Chinese, describes the forest dweller or *āraṇyaka* as a type of monk that the lay *bodhisattva* can encounter in a monastery (Nattier 2003, 89–96). Schopen (2005, 15–17) has noted that a defense of forest life appears especially in some works he identifies as early *Mahāyāna sūtras*: the *Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛcchā*, the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, the *Ratnarāśi* and the *Maitreyamāhasiṃhanāda sūtras*. In the first two of these *Mahāyāna* texts, retreat in the mountains is particularly encouraged. The *Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛcchā* states that it is desirable to take residence 'in mountains and ravines', a declaration of intent that could well have contributed to the revival of the Buddhist rock-cut architecture in the western Deccan. Much as in the first centuries of the Common Era, the nature and location of rock-cut establishments may have represented an ideal compromise between forest asceticism and institutionalized monasticism.

The Buddhist caves that are carefully planned spaces excavated on mountains and ravines in the wilderness perfectly epitomize the reconciliation of two apparently conflicting aspects of fifth century Buddhism: the necessity of having an organized monastic community and the ascetic ambitions of growing *Mahāyāna* communities. The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, in a dialogue between Mañjusrī and Maitreya (Kern 1884, 12, 1, v, 20–23), relates:

> Here and there, O Mañjuśrī, I behold beings who have abandoned their flourishing kingdoms, harems, and continents, left all their counselors and kinsmen, and betaken themselves to the guides of the world to ask for the most excellent law, for the sake of bliss; they put on reddish-yellow robes, and shave hair and beard. I see also many Bodhisattvas like monks, living in the forest, and others inhabiting the empty wilderness, engaged in reciting and living. And some Bodhisattvas I see, who, full of wisdom [or constancy], betake themselves to mountain caves, where by cultivating and meditating the Buddha knowledge they arrive at its perception.

[94] For a concise review of different scholarly interpretations of *Mahāyāna*, see Walser (2005, 16–24).

Perhaps the reinstatement of patronage at many rock-cut sites in the Ajanta range during the fifth century may be best explained as the result of converging circumstances: the new economic vigor of the region and the growing relevance of *Mahāyāna*. The *Mahāyāna* components blossomed at sites that were not so intimately linked to the imperial Vākāṭakas. When regional powers took control of the Ajanta area and patronage of the Buddhist caves became more fragmented and less institutionalized, *Mahāyāna* became very visible: cave 2 at Aurangabad, which postdates caves 1, 3, and 4a, seems to represent the full preeminence of *Mahāyāna* at a time when centripetal forces had taken over the region. However, the model I have suggested for the diffusion and establishment of *Mahāyāna* across the fifth century rock-cut sites in the Ajanta-Aurangabad area in the upper parts of the plateau should not be applied mechanically to every cave site in the western Deccan.

3.9 The Diffusion of *Mahāyāna* at Kanheri: A Coastal Phenomenon?

As I emphasized at the beginning of this book, it is important to keep in mind the differences among clusters of sites in different parts of the western Deccan. For example, at Buddhist sites near the coast and therefore closely linked to maritime commercial patronage, *Mahāyāna* ideas may have been asserted in different ways. For example, at Kanheri, which grew through the centuries without the centralization of patronage and vision found at a site like fifth century Ajanta, direct interaction by sea with communities where *Mahāyāna* was germinating may have contributed to a more immediate and unproblematic establishment of this movement. Contacts between Konkan and Sind, documented in the copperplate inscription dated to the fifth century and found near cave 3 at Kanheri, may have been underestimated as a means of spreading new Buddhist ideology from the northwestern areas.[95] For example, the fifth century idea of carving a colossal Buddha in the porch of the early apsidal hall at Kanheri (fig. 127), donated by the *mahāgandhakuṭī vārika*, may have reached Konkan directly from

[95] This votive inscription mentioning Buddharuci from Sind is now lost but it was apparently discovered in 1893 inside a *stūpa*-shaped momument, built of bricks, near cave 3 (Mirashi 1963a, 29–32).

the northwestern regions of the Subcontinent via Sind. It was in the Greater Gandhara region that the practice of adding gigantic Buddha images to Buddhist sacred areas became customary around the fourth century, in a time that preceded the decline of patronage but not of Buddhism in that region. The standing Buddhas added to the porch of the *caitya* hall 3 at Kanheri remind us of those carved at the end of the fourth century at Takht-i-Bahi in the Peshawar basin. At that major Buddhist site in Gandhara, fourteen monumental image shrines were built along the southern edge of the lower sacred area V, and four freestanding 6-metre-tall Buddhas were erected in stucco in the *stūpa* court XX (fig. 128) (Behrendt 2004, 186).

The two colossal standing Buddhas from the porch of cave 3 at Kanheri are represented in *varādamudrā* (fig. 127). This hand gesture, very common in the western Deccan at the end of the fifth century, may be directly linked to the triumph of *Mahāyāna* ideology in the area. The *varādamudrā* is generally associated with *bodhisattva* images and denotes the fulfillment of a vow.[96] Buddhas in *varādamudrā* are virtually absent from the Gandharan sculptural production of the Peshawar basin and Swat, with one exception: the *stūpa* court XX at Takht-i-Bahi, where a row of *varādamudrā* Buddhas decorates the upper register of *stūpa* P38. Perhaps the late colossal Buddhas in stucco that also stood in court XX displayed the same hand gesture. Some late Gandharan images from Afghanistan also display the *varādamudrā* (Saunders 1985, 276). In Gupta art, *bodhisattvas* are often represented with this hand gesture. However, Buddhas in *varādamudrā* only appear in *stelae* from Sarnath representing a single standing Buddha image or different events of his life clustered together. All of the Sarnath *stelae* with Buddha's life scenes include Buddhas in *varādamudrā* standing on lotus flowers; these are generally on the sides of images as epiphanies. One exception is a *stele* in the Sarnath Museum (Williams 1975, fig. 3) on which the *varādamudrā* Buddha, flanked by Brahmā and Indra, is descending from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven.[97]

Small Buddhas in *varādamudrā* appear in the iconography of the fifth century *caitya* halls excavated at Ajanta. They can be seen in cave 19

[96] The *varādamudrā* is called *Shih-tuan-yin* in Chinese and *Segan-in* in Japanese. The notion of dispensing favors for the well-being of the world is emphasized in the Sino-Japanese translation of this term as well (Saunders 1985, 52).

[97] Buddhas in *varādamudrā* also appear in two seventh century *stelae* from Sarnath depicting the descent from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven.

on the frieze (fig. 109), where they alternate with seated Buddha images framed in small *maṇḍirs*, and in cave 26 on the frieze above the pillars (fig. 126) and on the *stūpa* structure. However, the greatest concentration of such iconic *varādamudrā* Buddhas is at Ajanta on the façades of caves 19 and 26 (fig. 129).[98] All of them are seen as being 'intrusive' by Spink (2005) and are attributed to the so-called Period of Disruption that marked the end of large-scale patronage at Ajanta. It seems, therefore, that the Buddhas in *varādamudrā* on the façades of caves 19 and 26 were done when local powers, likely the Aśmaka kings, took control of the area, a time that I have argued herein was particularly propitious for the affirmation of *Mahāyāna* in the area. Standing Buddhas of different sizes in *varādamudrā* fill the area outside this cave; they are represented frontally, with flying *apsarās* and with small kneeling worshippers at their feet. An interesting variation on this dominant type is a composition consisting of two panels with *varādamudrā* Buddhas carved on either sides of the entrance to cave 19 at Ajanta (figs. 130, 131). These two images consist of rather abbreviated and 'iconic' representations of the Dīpaṃkara *jātaka* and the episode of the offering of a handful of dust (Vasant 1992; Taddei 2003b, 176–178; 2003c, 329–334), two important instances where the Buddha predicts future rebirths for his devotees. They are especially interesting because they establish a clear link between the *varadāmudrā* and the notion of *pranidhāna*, or vow, in this particular case the Buddha being the one to hear the vow of the devotee. *Pranidhāna* consists in 'a strong wish, aspiration, prayers or an inflexible determination to carry out one's will even through an infinite series of rebirth', and it is a practice closely associated with the observance of the *bodhisattva* path in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism (Suzuki 1906, 337). The *varādamudrā* as a gesture may reflect the key *Mahāyāna* idea of a devotee taking the vow of entering the path to becoming a *bodhisattva* and walking on the path to enlightenment through subsequent rebirths. In the panels flanking the entrance to cave 19, the Buddha in *varādamudrā* is accepting the vow, and the kneeling devotees often present at the base of these images emblematically represent the donor and the community wishing to obtain the fulfillment of this important vow. Taddei (2003a, 178) notes that in the Gandharan versions of the episodes of

[98] Walter Spink argues that some of these images may display this specific *mudrā* because the carvers encountered flaws in the rock and had no choice.

the Dipaṃkāra *jātaka* and the offering of a handful of dust, which are iconically represented outside Ajanta cave 19, although there is no *varādamudrā*, flames rise from the Buddha's shoulder, emphasizing the theological relevance of the moment.[99] The *varādamudrā* Buddha in the western Deccan seems to convey the same notion of epiphanic universality: the presence of flying beings and in some cases of ornate pavilions, locate the Buddha fulfilling the vow in a realm other than the one where the devotees stand, possibly a celestial one. This hypothesis is corroborated by the presence of *varādamudrā* in Gupta *stelae* from Sarnath. This gesture appears almost exclusively in conjunction with epiphanic manifestations of the Buddha, in which he multiplies his images on lotus flowers, or in depictions of his descent from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven that elaborate upon the idea of miraculous apparitions of the Buddha.

The two most prominent *varādamudrā* Buddhas at Ajanta are those symmetrically carved high on the sides of the cave 26 façade, probably conceived as a pair, as Spink (2005, 207) has suggested, and positioned similarly to the colossal ones carved outside apsidal hall 3 at Kanheri. The *varādamudrā* Buddhas on the cave 26 façade also have devotees kneeling at their feet, and the left one bears a votive inscription by a *śākyabhikṣu*, a term generally associated with *Mahāyāna* (Cohen 1995, 381, no. 94). On the basis of the observations above, it is possible to conclude that the site of Ajanta may well embody the scenario that Walser (2004, 58) has envisioned for the institutionalization of *Mahāyāna*: a group of monks within a given monastic institution who vow to follow an additional set of ritual and ethical obligations. As the imperial power and patronage of the Vākāṭakas faded in the western Deccan, the *Mahāyāna* communities already present there may have taken over the rock-cut Buddhist sites of the Ajanta range.

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[99] Taddei (2003a) explains the flames appearing in connection with the Dīpaṃkara Buddha in Gandhara as being weighted with religious and political symbolism alluding to kingship.

CHAPTER FOUR

BUDDHIST PRACTICE AT AURANGABAD IN THE SIXTH CENTURY

4.1 Cave 2 at Aurangabad: Votive Imagery, *Mahāyāna*, and the Laity

Cave 2, wedged in the rock of the western group of Aurangabad between the unfinished cave 1 and cave 3 (figs. 4 and 18), is a small excavation that in terms of architectural, artistic, and religious concepts represents a major change from established models. While caves 1 and 3 continue the Ajanta idiom and were probably executed by artists experienced at Ajanta, cave 2 breaks the established tradition and introduces new forms in cave architecture. This cave represents a new patronage phase at Aurangabad, and it was probably excavated at the beginning of the sixth century CE, as the Kalacuri rulers emerged in the region and work in cave 3 had already stopped. Cave 2 does not conform to the traditional *vihāra* or *caitya* hall prototypes. It consists of a central sanctum, containing the main Buddha in *bhadrāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā*, surrounded by a corridor for circumambulation and preceded by a small *maṇḍapa* (figs. 18, 19). Its basic layout, a square hall with no cells, indicates that this was not a monastic dwelling (fig. 17). In line with what we observed for the previous phases of activity, Aurangabad seems not to have relied on a significant component of resident monks. The presence of a circumambulatory path, however, suggests that much like earlier *caitya* halls, this cave may have been conceived mainly as a public ritual space.

The devotional matrix of the cave is also suggested by the fact that the corridor surrounding the shrine of the cave is filled with a multitude of heterogeneous sculpted panels depicting a Buddha flanked by two *bodhisattvas* (figs. 24, 25). The placement on the wall and the differing sizes of the sculptures, along with their repetitive iconographies, suggest that they were votive panels commissioned by individual donors. It appears that when the cave was excavated, the *pradakṣiṇāpatha* was intentionally left undecorated to accommodate these attestations of

devotion. The panels were first carved in the most desirable and visible parts of the circumambulatory path and then progressively occupied the less well lit back sections of the walls. The dark areas of the corridor behind the sanctum were left completely plain, although the walls were smooth and finished.[1] Several holes left by hooks to hold garlands can still be seen amid the panels located to the right of the shrine near the entrance (fig. 26), indicating the worship practices of the devotees.

Votive panels carved on the walls of caves are a common phenomenon associated with *Mahāyāna* patronage in the western Deccan. They are found almost everywhere, at Ajanta, Karli, Kanheri, Nasik, Kuda, and many other sites, but nowhere else do they display the degree of organization evident in cave 2 at Aurangabad. In the Vākāṭaka caves at Ajanta, Spink (2005, Vol. 3) has labeled these tableaux 'intrusive'; he argues that they were added when the Vākāṭakas lost control over the caves and imperial patronage collapsed prior to abandonment of the complex. However, at Aurangabad cave 2 this imagery evokes the actual life of the site and appears perfectly integrated into the original design of the cave, as the panels are rather evenly distributed on the side walls. There are also small panels carved in the interior of cave 2 shrine depicting individual Buddha and *bodhisattva* images.

The devotional origin of the panels in the circumambulatory path of cave 2 seems clear, for many include depictions of donors or worshippers in the bottom register, and some even bear traces of small painted inscriptions (fig. 29). The practice of inscribing these types of panels is supported by findings from the Kuda caves in the Konkan coastal region, in the Raigad district by the estuary of the river Rajpuri in the area of Janjira. At that site six epigraphs, re-translated by Mallebrein (1986), were inscribed on the surfaces of votive panels representing a Buddha flanked by *bodhisattvas* virtually identical to the ones in Aurangabad cave 2. The Kuda panels in question are in the *caitya* hall, and most of the inscriptions were incised on the tableau surfaces right above or below images of kneeling donors, thus confirming the findings from Aurangabad cave 2. For example, inscription no. 7 at Kuda is incised below a kneeling devotee and identifies the panel as being

[1] Votive panels were primarily located in visible areas of the structure. It is possible that some votive tableaux may also have been painted at Aurangabad.

the gift of a *śākyopāsikā*, a lay devotee, likely the figure represented above the inscription (Mallebrein 1986, 108–14).[2]

At Aurangabad the donor images and the inscriptions were placed at the bottom of the panels in exactly the same position, as if they were interchangeable signatures for individual donations. Unlike at Ajanta, where the donors of the so-called intrusive images were mostly monks, at Aurangabad they appear to have been mostly lay people, many of them women, and only a few members of the *saṃgha*.[3] This corroborates the hypothesis that the caves at Aurangabad continued through time to be characterized by a prominent lay presence and patronage. Additionally, in four panels from cave 2 a squatting female holding a lotus, resembling the non-Buddhist goddess Lajjā Gaurī, is depicted in the bottom part of the tableaux where the worshippers are (figs. 27, 28).

The main iconography of the 84 panels carved along the side walls of the *maṇḍapa* and *pradakṣiṇā* of cave 2, consisting of a Buddha flanked by two *bodhisattvas*, is not completely standardized (figs. 23, 24, 25). Careful examination of the triad imagery reveals significant iconographical patterns within the established blueprint that cannot be ascribed simply to arbitrary choices. The central Buddha is seated in *bhadrāsana* or *dhyānamudrā*, he displays the teaching gesture or the *dhyānamudrā*, he wears the *saṃghatī* with or without one shoulder covered, *nāgas* sometimes hold the stem of the lotus flower on which the Buddha sits or rests his feet, and even the iconography of the two *bodhisattva*s demonstrates significant variation, often leaving us in the dark as to their identity. In addition to triad panels, there are also a few images of standing, isolated Buddhas in *varādamudrā*.

The repetitive iconography and visually complex syntax of these panels appears particularly enigmatic at first glance. However, given the dominant lay nature of Aurangabad audiences, this body of imagery may be especially useful in shedding light on the kind of *Mahāyāna* popular in a non-monastic environment. In cave 2 at Aurangabad,

[2] The *śākyopāsika* is to be understood as a lay counterpart of the *śākyabhikṣu* mentioned in inscriptions and associated, not without contempt, to the practice of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. For a brief overview of the debate over the meaning of *śākyabhikṣu* see Walser (2004, 36–43).

[3] Most of the donors of the 'intrusive' panels at Ajanta are identified in inscriptions as being *śākyabhikṣus*, members of the monastic community. The only exceptions are two painted inscriptions, nos. 13 and 14 from cave 2, where the word *śākyopāsikā* occurs (Cohen 2006, 280–81).

we are fortunate to have a relatively homogeneous sample of votive images in a single location and a limited chronological horizon.

At Aurangabad, as in many other cave sites in the western Deccan, the triad format seems to be the one of choice for votive panels. However, scholars have yet to determine definitively what the triad stands for. This iconographical type has been generally associated with *Mahāyāna* and is well documented in the northwest of the Subcontinent before it appeared in the Deccan Plateau.[4] Many scholars have discussed its possible meaning in a Gandharan context; *stelae* representing triads or elaborations upon this basic motif have been variously interpreted as referencing the Miracle of Shravasti, Sukhāvatī, or, most recently, visions of a Buddha having attained *samādhi* (Foucher 1917, 147–84; Huntington 1980; Rhi 2003). As noted by Rhi (2003, 171), the Gandharan triads might be the sources for the Deccan iconography. In the Deccan, however, we see a greater degree of generalization and a significant change in the depiction of the central Buddha image. The Buddha flanked by two *bodhisattvas* is more frequently portrayed in *bhadrāsana* and on a throne rather than in *dhyānāsana* and sitting on a lotus. The *bhadrāsana* Buddha in *dharmacakramudrā* replicates a format well established on a larger scale in the Ajanta shrines at the end of the fifth century, a format that alludes to the Tathāgata's kingship and the revelation of a teaching. As noted earlier, the Buddha is also generally in this position in fifth century art as he preaches in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven.

On a very general level, the iconographic schemes of the tableaux carved in cave 2 at Aurangabad at the beginning of the sixth century encapsulate the very essence of *Mahāyāna* tradition, the same one that underlies the rather complex and articulated *sūtra* literature. The central Buddha in the triads, whether Śākyamuni or another Buddha, is either the *dharma* king in *bhadrāsana* or the accomplished practitioner in *dhyānāsana* attaining a miraculous meditative state. The sculpted imagery, like most of the *Mahāyāna* texts, evokes kingship, delivery of sermons, and meditation. The transmission of the creed is a key factor in *Mahāyāna sūtras,* and the act of teaching is vital in introducing those who have faith to the clearest visions. The *sūtras* are also very repetitive, and their efficaciousness appears to be rooted in the

[4] To my knowledge, no images of triads have been reported from the Buddhist sites of Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh.

recurrence of the revelations. Similarly, the Aurangabad cave 2 panels are very formulaic, and patterns of repetition seem to constitute the framework on which both textual and visual *Mahāyānas* are built.

Beyond the generic *Mahāyāna* tone of these panels, it is possible that the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* may have inspired some aspects of the iconographies. As demonstrated by Schopen (2005, 293–294), this text was known at Ajanta, since a painting on a pillar in Ajanta cave 10 represents the episode of the *stūpa* of Prabhūtarātna related in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. This 'early-middle' *sūtra* based upon the figure of the historic Buddha Śākyamuni imparting *Mahāyāna* teachings, was very popular across the Buddhist world.[5] The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* captures well some of the atmosphere of the western Deccan caves. The textual narrative bears vivid traces of conflicts among different parts of the Buddhist community, such as the dichotomy between forest asceticism and organized monasticism, and attempts to reconcile such diversity within the *Mahāyāna* universality. The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* emphasizes the notion of *upāya-kauśalya,* or skillful means, recognizes the relative validity of different worship practices, including those of *stūpas* and images, and opens a door to lay worshippers, female devotees, and nuns. It also places special emphasis on the cult of Avalokiteśvara, to which a whole chapter of the *sūtra* is dedicated (Schopen 2005, 278–98). It is not surprising, therefore, that the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* was influential in the Ajanta range and was known among the patrons of Aurangabad cave 2 at the beginning of the sixth century. Further, this *sūtra* praises the merit of image making and therefore validates the practice of donating images that is at the core of Aurangabad cave 2.

The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* may be helpful in explaining the role, identity, and iconographic variability of the Buddhas carved in the votive panels of Aurangabad cave 2, images shown in different positions and displaying different hand gestures. The *Saddharampuṇḍarīka sūtra* opens with a description of the Buddha preaching on Mount Gridhrakuta in Rajagriha surrounded by a cosmic assembly that could

[5] The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* combines prose in pure Sanskrit with verses in 'mixed Sanskrit', the prose probably being a later addition to the verses. Winternitz (1999, 291–92) says that it is very difficult to date with precision that particular *sūtra,* imbued with the spirit of the *Purāṇas*. The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* was translated several times into Chinese: the first translation, dating to 223 CE, does not survive. However, we do have those done by Dharmarakṣa in 286 CE, by Kumārajīva in about 400 CE, and by Jñānagupta and Dharmagupta in 601 CE. See also Boucher 1998.

easily transform the earthly location of the sermon into a heavenly one (Kern 1884, I, 1–7):

> Now at that time it was that the Lord surrounded, attended, honoured, revered, venerated, worshipped by the four classes of hearers, after expounding the Dharmaparyāya called 'the Great Exposition', a text of great development, serving to instruct *bodhisattva*s and proper to all Buddhas, sat cross-legged on the seat of the law and entered upon the meditation termed 'the station of the exposition of Infinity'; his body was motionless and his mind had reached perfect tranquility. And as soon as the Lord had entered upon his meditation, there fell a great rain of divine flowers,... while the whole Buddha field shook in six ways.... Then those who were assembled and sitting together in that congregation, monks, nuns, male and female lay devotees...gazed on the Lord in astonishment, in amazement, in ecstasy.

In cave 2 panels we see represented the key elements of these epic events: the Buddha teaching and meditating, the *bodhisattvas* assisting him, the devotees gazing at the Buddha. Throughout the text every Tathāgata, past and future, follows quite faithfully this blueprint, established by Śākyamuni, which involves, precisely in the same sequence and surroundings, the teaching of the *dharma* followed by the attainment of *samādhi*. Śākyamuni acts in the world sphere, Saha, while other Tathāgatas reveal the truth in their own Buddha fields, but the script is essentially the same.[6] Thus it is possible that the various Buddha images represented in different positions and with different hand gestures in each of the votive panels of Aurangabad cave 2 represent Śākyamuni and possibly other Tathāgatas involved in the delivery of the *Mahāyāna* truth. In visual terms the key moments of the delivery of the sermon and the attainment of *samādhi* are alluded to by the alternate use of the *bhadrāsana* and *dhyānāsana* pose. References to Tathāgatas sitting on thrones are ubiquitous in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, as they are in cave 2 votive panels, and of course the lotuses encapsulate the leitmotif of this *sūtra*.[7] The text also clearly spells out that having finished teaching, the Buddha sat with his legs crossed in lotus position and entered into *samādhi*. The devotees eventually joined their hands and gazed at him. The same scenario is repeated as other Tathāgatas engage in the teaching of the *sūtra* in

[6] On the concept of Buddha field, see Williams (1989, 224–27).

[7] Some of the past Tathāgatas mentioned in the text include Candrasūryapradipa and Dīpaṃkara (Kern 1884 I, 18 and 28).

their own sphere of existence. The cave 2 panels capture the crucial moments related to the delivery of this creed: the teaching of the truth and the attainment of *samādhi*. The worshippers who gaze at the Buddha image in the panels are probably the donors of the panels who became direct recipients of the teaching and witnesses of the *samādhi* as described in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*. In six of the panels in which the Buddha is in *bhadrāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā*, the wheel and the deer are represented right next to the devotees at the bottom of the panels. It is clear in these instances that the iconography hints simultaneously at the delivery of the first sermon at Sarnath and the delivery of the *Mahāyāna* teachings. In the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*, where great emphasis is placed on *upāya-kauśalya*, or skillful means, in the propagation of *dharma*, the preaching at Sarnath is associated on a lower level to the teaching of the *Mahāyāna* truth. The audience witnessing these two deliveries is exactly the same. Here is how the text conflates the sermon at Sarnath with the teaching of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (Kern 1884, III, 70, verses 33–34):

> The Wheel of the law has been put in motion by the Lord, the first time at Benares at Rṣipatana in the Deer Park; to-day has the Lord again put in motion the supreme wheel of the law. And on that occasion those divine beings uttered the following stanzas: The wheel of the law was put in motion by thee, O thou that art unrivaled in the world, at Benares, O great hero! [That wheel which is the rotation of] the rise and decay of all aggregates. There it was put in motion for the first time; now, a second time, it is turned here, O Lord.

Another iconographic detail in the cave 2 tableaux that seems to be a function of the positions and *mudrās* assumed by the main Buddhas is the way in which the *saṃghatī* is worn. In most of the votive images where the Buddha appears in *bhadrāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā*, he wears the *saṃghatī* with his left shoulder uncovered. This detail perhaps was used as a device to highlight the moment of public delivery of a teaching. In the Pāli *vinaya* as well as in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* itself, the *saṃghatī* worn on one shoulder is generally seen as a sign of respect, and thus it would be appropriately worn in a public setting when addressing an audience.[8]

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[8] In the *Mahāvagga* there are many instances where monks uncover one shoulder as a sign of respect to their superiors. During specific ceremonies such as the *Pavāraṇā,* senior monks uncover one shoulder before addressing the *saṃgha* (Rhys Davids 1881, 329). In the fourth chapter of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra,* illustrious

In the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka, bodhisattvas* are the foremost witnesses of the delivery of the true law. Many *bodhisattvas* are listed as being among the celestial and human bystanders at the event, yet they would be impossible to recognize in visual repertoires, as no distinctive iconographic marks are mentioned.[9] In the votive panels from Aurangabad cave 2 there are always two *bodhisattvas* standing on lotus flowers that accompany the main Buddha: one in princely garb and always wearing a scarf diagonally across his waist, and the other in ascetic garb and holding a lotus flower. Both of them have fly whisks, which in Indian culture are traditional attributes of subsidiary figures. The fact that such paraphernalia are always carried by the *bodhisattvas* in cave 2 panels indicates that they where intended to perform the role of attendants to the Buddha, who in turn is depicted as the king of *dharma* or the king of *samādhi*.

The ascetic *bodhisattva* generally positioned to the proper left of the Buddha can be identified with Avalokiteśvara, who occupies a prominent position in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and to whom the whole twenty-fourth chapter of this *sūtra* was dedicated.[10] In cave 2 panels he is recognizable because of his hairstyle and the long-stemmed lotus flower he holds.[11] More problematic is the identification of the *bodhisattva* wearing a crown, as he does not show any emblems that can be easily recognized. As one of the prominent figures of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* is Mañjuśrī, who is always called in the text 'the prince royal', it could well be that the *bodhisattva* displaying princely attributes in Aurangabad cave 2 is in fact Mañjuśrī. The same princely attire is shared, however, in cave 2 by other *bodhisattvas* who hold *vajras*, such as the one represented in a large panel carved on the left wall of the porch, or have a *stūpa* in the crown, such as the *bodhisattva*

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disciples pull the edge of the *saṃghati* over one shoulder as they approach the Buddha (Kern 1884, IV, 98).

[9] Some of the *bodhisattva*s mentioned in the opening section of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* are: Mañjusrī, as prince royal; *mahāsattvas* Avalokiteśvara, Mahāśthamaprāpta, Sarvārthanāmān, Nityodyukta, Anikṣiptadhura, Ratnapāṇi, Bhaiśajarāja, Pradānāsurā, Ratnacandra, Ratnaprabha, Pūrnacandra, Mahāvikrāmin, Trailokavikrāmin, Ananatavikrāmin, Mahāpratibhāna, Satasamitābhiyukta, Dharaṇīdhara, Akṣayamati, Padmaśri, Nakśatrarāja, Maitreya, and Siṃha (Kern 1884, I, 4).

[10] On this twenty-fourth chapter, particularly how it relates to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and to Avalokiteśvara's images in Ajanta, see Schopen (2005, 278–98).

[11] Avalokiteśvara is positioned to the right of the Buddha in the Aurangabad cave 3 shrine. In the votive panels in cave 2, Avalokiteśvara's iconography is much more articulated and fluid.

flanking the main Buddha image in the shrine. Therefore, it seems that the *bodhisattva*'s princely attire alone does not allow for a definitive identification. In many triad images from Gandhara, which Rhi (2006) has suggested may be the models for the Deccan ones, Maitreya always appears flanking the central Buddha. However, it is impossible to say whether the crowned *bodhisattva* in cave 2 is actually Maitreya, who is also mentioned as being one of the main interlocutors of the Buddha along with Mañjuśrī in the narrative of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*.

In the votive sculptures from Aurangabad cave 2, two *nāgarājas* appear at the base of the lotus flower where the Buddha sits. They are represented at the very bottom of the panel emerging from the water and holding with their hands the stem of the lotus; they are right next to the kneeling devotees.[12] The *nāga* kings and their retinues are mentioned in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* as being among the witnesses of the Tathāgata's delivery of the *dharma* and *samādhi*. The depiction of such figures in the Aurangabad cave 2 votive panels possibly representing the Buddha delivering the sermon on Mount Gridhakuta is logical, considering the role of the *nāgas* as guardians of the *dharma* and their association with mountains and water. Mount Gridhakuta is conceptually associated with the mythical Mount Meru, and the two *nāgarājas* holding the lotus stem clearly refer to this cosmic mountain emerging from the endless water.[13] This visual analogy was discussed

[12] A very similar iconographic composition is found in the seventh century chapel 37 at the Buddhist site of Tapa Sardar in Afghanistan. Verardi (Verardi and Paparatti 2005, 436–437) mentions that the western Deccan panels may be the source for the Tapa Sardar iconography.

[13] Mount Meru or Mount Mandara occupies a key position in both Buddhist and Hindu cosmic mythologies. In cave 2 votive panels, the *nāgarājas* holding the lotus on which the Buddha sits, an allegory for Mount Meru, seem to echo the role played by the *nāgarāja* Vasukī in the Vaiṣṇava myth of the Churning of the Ocean of Milk (see Wilson 1864, chap. IX, 76). In this story, related in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and in other Hindu sources, the snake king is the cord used by gods and demons to churn the Ocean of Milk, and Mount Meru becomes the churn. Many things are generated by this churning; among them is poison, which is then ingested by the *nāga*s that live in the water. The goddess Śrī, associated with fortune, abundance, and fertility, also emerges, holding a lotus flower, from the cosmic water as a result of the churning, and perhaps the presence of Lajjā Gaurī holding the lotus in these panels, next to the *nāgarājas* in the water, may have some relationship to this myth. Images depicting this Hindu creation myth appear only later in Indian art. However, it is possible that the tale related in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* may have been popular at the beginning of the sixth century and may have had some impact on the visual language used to represent the *Mahāyānic* panels in Aurangabad cave 2. There are other instances of 'purāṇic contamination' in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. Studholme (2002, 19–36) has demonstrated

many years ago by Coomaraswamy (1979, 53–54), who also came to the conclusion that a triad image added to the façade of the Karli *caitya* may have been a representation of the Buddha preaching on Mount Gridhakuta.

The snake kings were also prominent figures in the Buddhist culture of the western Deccan caves: the recurring images of *nāgas* at rock-cut sites suggest that from early on they carried out the important function of guardians of the establishments protecting the Buddha and the *dharma*. *Nāga*s inhabited the same mountains and used the same resources as the members of the Buddhist community did.[14] This is made very clear by the fifth century inscription from cave 16 at Ajanta in which the Vākāṭaka minister Varāhadeva states that the mountain where the caves were located was also the home of a *nāga* king, likely the *nāga* celebrated in the shrine placed next to cave 16, watching a key point of access to the site (Mirashi 1963b, 110).[15] Thus the presence of *nāga* kings in the cave 2 panels may have allowed the viewer to locate the setting of the Buddha's sermon simultaneously on a local level, among indigenous *nāgas* and devotees, and on a universal plane, among celestial spectators on Mount Gridhakuta.

The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* is a text that was greatly favored in China during the fifth century (Leidy 2008, 86); many tableaux, from Yungang to Dunhuang, were inspired by the Prabhūtārātna *stūpa* episode included in this work. Also in China early carvings related to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, although emphasizing different parts of the text, were still the object of individual donations made to attain merit and possibly help with mundane matters. For instance, the first datable image that can be linked to this *sūtra*, from cave 17 at Yungang, was given by a nun hoping to recover from illness and for the wellbeing of ancestors, parents, and teachers (Wang 2005, 24). In this sculptural example from Yungang the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* image was closely associated with that of Maitreya in Tuṣita heaven, a connection perhaps explained in light of the salvific power of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*

that chapters of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* show a very close connection with stories from the *Purāṇas*.

[14] The *saṃgha*, in turn, may have acted as mediator between the *nāga* deity and the laity. On the presence of *nāgas* and their role in the Buddhist caves of the western Deccan, see DeCaroli (2004, 75–89).

[15] The beautiful *nāgarāja* image, sponsored by Varāhadeva, is still visible today just below cave 16, guarding the entrance to the Vākāṭaka caves.

sūtra to affect future rebirths (Wang 2005, 317–318).[16] The hypothesis that a similar power was attributed to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* in the western Deccan would explain the boom in the creation of individual votive panels inspired by this *sūtra* during the sixth century at Aurangabad and other sites in the region.

While the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* may have inspired the iconographic compositions of cave 2, a tone of generality dominates the votive panels at Aurangabad. The Buddhas represented are not specifically identified, and the iconography of the *bodhisattvas* is surprisingly fluid, but it would seem that the lack of definite identity did not interfere with the efficaciousness of the imagery. Visually these scenes transcend the specific source that inspired them to become emblems of universal *Mahāyāna* beliefs, illustrations of a generalized goal. This is, in my opinion, parallel to the phenomenon observed by Schopen in *Mahāyāna* literature regarding Sukhāvatī. Schopen (2005, 154–89) argues that after the second century Sukhāvatī became a generalized religious goal open to the whole *Mahāyāna* community. It acquired very broad connotations and became disassociated from the particular figure of the Buddha Amitābha. The lack of iconographical specifications in the cave 2 panels could reflect a trend emerging with the popularization of *Mahāyāna:* the various realms of rebirth were no longer rigorously associated with individual Buddhas or *bodhisattvas* but became universalized objectives for the devotees.

4.2 The Squatting Goddess in Cave 2 Votive Panels

Especially enigmatic is the inclusion in four votive panels at Aurangabad cave 2 of a small squatting female with her sexual organ exposed. In all of the four instances this figure is carved in the lower part of the tableaux at the same hierarchic level of *nāgas* and devotees. The largest and most visible panel that includes this figure is carved on the left wall of the cave (fig. 27). She is right beneath the stem of the right lotus flower, in perfect symmetry with the figure of a kneeling female devotee represented on the opposite corner of the panel. In all the tableaux she occupies the same position.

[16] The panel was placed by the window, in a very visible part of the cave, much like the votive panels at Aurangabad.

Who is she? She must have been a recognizable and established figure in the cultic world of the patrons, considering how commonly she is represented in cave 2 votive panels. Her squatting posture (fig. 28) is typically associated with female goddesses or *mātṛkās*: in Kuṣāṇa sculpture from Mathura the goddess Hārītī always sits with legs apart, possibly in reference to childbirth, as some images suggest.[17] The squatting female represented at Aurangabad shows all the iconographic attributes of a female goddess, possibly Lajjā Gaurī, a popular deity represented squatting and holding lotuses, whose traits relate to fertility, auspiciousness, and abundance. Emerging within the realm of popular devotional and regional cults, Lajjā Gaurī eventually found a place in the Śaiva tradition, as her name indicates. Bolon (1992) notes that the cult of Lajjā Gaurī was very popular in central India and especially in Maharashtra, where on many votive plaques dating to the fourth to sixth centuries the goddess was represented with a human body and a lotus head.[18] Some of the earliest fully anthropomorphic images of the goddess Lajjā Gaurī in the western Deccan come from the Śaiva rock-cut sites of Elephanta and Ellora (fig. 157) dating to the sixth century.[19] Bolon (1992) suggests that the presence of Lajjā Gaurī in cave 21 at Ellora may be linked to the special emphasis on fertility throughout the iconography of this particular Śaiva cave, touching upon the themes of love, marriage, and fertility (fig. 158). Ellora cave 21 is located not very far away from the waterfall, and 'water is essentially associated to fertility worship and Lajjā Gaurī' (Bolon 1992, 34). Images of this goddess also appear on water tanks at sites like Aihole or Siddhanakolla dating to the Cālukyan period, and Bolon (1992, 24–33) has noted that many of the temples where images of the squatting deity have been found can be linked to the Śaiva Pāśupata sect.

The presence of the squatting goddess in Aurangabad cave 2 is especially intriguing. The figure is right by the *nāgas* emerging from the

[17] A good example is a Kuṣāṇa period Hārītī from Mathura in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (acc. no. 1971.36 1), pictured in Srinivasan (1997, pl. 14.19).

[18] In several plaques dating to the third and fourth centuries CE from the sites of Ter, Yeleshvaram, Kondapur, and Nagarjunakonda in the heart of the Deccan, the image of the human body of the goddess is explicitly associated with a vase. See Bolon (1992, figs. 1–12). Srinivasan (1997, 203) interprets this feature as a reference to the *pūrṇaghaṭa*.

[19] A stone plaque representing Lajjā Gaurī was found at Elephanta, and a large image of the goddess was carved on the Nandi pedestal outside cave 21 at Ellora (Bolon 1992, 34) (fig. 157).

water. Although she is anthropomorphic, the lotus flower stem grows out of her head as if to refer explicitly to the most common form of Lajjā Gaurī in the western Deccan: the goddess with a lotus head. What role could Lajjā Gaurī play in the Buddhist imagery of cave 2?[20] Brown (1990) notes that unlike most Lajjā Gaurī representations, the squatting female in Aurangabad sits with her feet firmly on the ground and has a lotus flower in only one hand (fig. 28). Brown proposes that the squatting goddess may be a 'proto-Vasudhāra' holding an ear of wheat, with a hairstyle very similar to that of the Buddhist Tārā. However, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* contains an interesting passage that may help explain the presence of the mysterious female goddess in the votive panels of Aurangabad cave 2. Part of the eleventh chapter of this *Mahāyāna sūtra* relates the story of a female goddess publicly displaying her genitals. She was the daughter of a *nāga* king, lived at the bottom of the ocean, and magically changed sex in order to become a *bodhisattva* (Kern 1884, XI, no. 51, 252–53). In this story, Mañjuśrī went to preach the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* at the bottom of the ocean, where the most receptive being for this doctrine was the daughter of the *nāga* king Sāgara (Ocean). There was an obstacle that prevented her from gaining the supreme knowledge: she was female.[21] Then, magically, 'At the same instant, before the sight of the whole world and of the senior priest Śāriputra, the female sex of the daughter of Sāgara, the *nāga*-king, disappeared; the male sex appeared and she manifested herself as a *bodhisattva*…' (Kern 1884, XI, 253). Although this episode may not be literally represented in cave 2 reliefs, nevertheless the presence of a female goddess displaying her sex in both the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and in the cave 2 panels is notable. In the votive carvings the female goddess is placed in the ocean right next to the the nāgas and displays her sex 'before the sight of the whole world', much as described in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*.

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[20] At the Vākāṭaka site of Mansar, plaques depicting Umā-Maheśvara and Lajjā Gaurī were found together in what the excavators thought was a Buddhist *stūpa*. However, Bakker (2004, 75) has shown that the large structure in question was actually linked to Hindu practices.

[21] The *Mahāyāna* movement was very much male dominated: women could not attain Buddhahood. As Nattier (2004, 99) has noted, 'Unlike earlier terms for Buddhist practitioners (e.g. *upāsaka, bhikṣu,* and *arhant*), the words 'Buddha' and '*bodhisattva*' have no feminine forms (though these would have been perfectly easy to construct in Sanskrit or Prakrit)'.

Why is her likeness included in the votive imagery at Aurangabad? Perhaps this female goddess embodied the hopes of female devotees to gain access to the highest truth. Many *Mahāyāna* texts transmit a negative attitude towards women, who are precluded from easy access (or any access at all) to *bodhisattva*hood (Harrison 1987, 76–77). However, most of the kneeling worshippers represented in the cave 2 votive panels are lay devotees, and many are women. If these kneeling images reflect the actual patronage pool of Aurangabad cave 2, as I believe they do, then the inclusion of the squatting goddess in votive panels sponsored by women is understandable. Female devotees may have wanted to include images of the daughter of the *nāga* king Sāgara as a symbol of their pledge to walk on the path to Buddhahood and to overcome their femininity in order to commit to that course. How can we visualize the Buddhist transformation of this female deity, daughter of a *nāgarāja* and living in the ocean, who publicly displayed her sex and magically turned into a *bodhisattva*, if not by bringing in an image of Lajjā Gaurī, the local goddess associated with water, fertility, and lotuses?

Lajjā Gaurī's attributes of fertility and abundance were also shared by the goddess Lakṣmī. According to Kern (1884, XI, 251, footnote 1), who translated the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*, Lakṣmī is identical with the daughter of Sāgara, the ocean king. Kern (1884, XI, 253, footnote 2) also remarks that this *sūtra* ascribes to the female goddess some of the features of Tārā. This may explain why in these panels the squatting goddess has been given the headdress characteristic of the female *bodhisattva* Tārā, as noted by Brown (1990). The squatting goddess associated with the lotus fits well into the hierarchical schemes outlined by the *sūtra*. She appears at the lower levels occupied by devotees and subsidiary deities, at the bottom of the ocean, next to the *nāgarāja* holding the lotus stem.[22] All of these elements suggest that effigies of Lajjā Gaurī were intentionally included by devotees as metaphors for the preconditional changes of a female devotee pursuing the true *dharma*. This goddess was extremely popular in Maharashtra, as demonstrated by Bolon (1992), and no other image could have better embodied the hopes, and transformations that are

[22] Srinivasan (1997, 203) notes that the figure of Lajjā Gaurī must be conceptually related to that of the potbellied *yakṣa* with a lotus flower stemming from its body that so frequently appears on the *vedikā* decoration of early *stūpas* such as those at Bharhut and Sanchi.

embedded in the story of Sāgara's daughter and in every woman's path to Buddhahood.

4.3 The Bodhisattvas in Cave 2: The *Stūpa* in the Crown

It is well known that *Mahāyāna* Buddhism placed great emphasis on the role of *bodhisattva* and the practices associated with that path: the expression *bodhisattvayāna* or '*bodhisattva* vehicle' captures the essence of this religious movement.[23] The place that *bodhisattvas* occupy in the *sūtras* is mirrored by the increasing visibility of these figures in the rock-cut caves of the western Deccan. While the *bodhisattvas* represented in the Aurangabad cave 2 panels may still look rather generalized to accommodate the emblematic nature of this body of imagery, the large-scale *bodhisattva*s that accompany the main Buddha images inside and outside the cave shrines all display more specific iconographies (fig. 19). At Aurangabad large-scale *bodhisattva*s with recognizable iconographic marks appear in the cave 3 shrine (fig. 37): to the Buddha's left stands a *bodhisattva* with a *stūpa* in his crown, and on the opposite side of the main image is an ascetic *bodhisattva* with a small Buddha in his hairdo. While the latter can be immediately recognized as being Avalokiteśvara, there is no sure identification of the *bodhisattva* with the *stūpa* in his crown. This emblem has been generally associated with Maitreya in later Buddhist sculpture. However *Mahāyāna sūtras* never include much detail on the iconography and placement of *bodhisattva*s that may be the object of spiritual contemplation by the devotee. Only in later tantric *sādhanas* are there precise indications of the configurations of these *bodhisattva*s. Perhaps the lack of absolute iconographic specifications for the protagonists of the *Mahāyāna sūtras* matches the fluidity we observe in *bodhisattva* iconographies at Ajanta and Aurangabad. This may explain why in Aurangabad cave 2 the headdress with the *stūpa* is worn by a *bodhisattva* holding a lotus standard (fig. 19) and in cave 6 the same headdress is worn by a *bodhisattva* holding a *vajra* (fig. 60). Similarly in Aurangabad caves 2 and 3 there seem to have been no rules about the placement of specific *bodhisattva*s to the left or right of the

[23] On the term *bodhisattvayāna* see Durt (1994, 778).

Buddha.[24] This suggests that when caves 2 and 3 were decorated with sculptures, the placement and iconography of *bodhisattvas* were not yet rigidly codified, or at least that their lack of specificity did not affect their religious efficaciousness.

The oversize sculpted *bodhisattva*s standing outside the shrine of Aurangabad cave 2 must have been cult figures in their own right (fig. 19). They are located in a visible and accessible position, right next to the votive panels where garlands offered by the devotees would have been hooked.[25] Both *bodhisattva*s hold a long-stemmed lotus flower on which sits a small Buddha in *dhyānāsana*. The standing *bodhisattva* to the right of the shrine entrance has an ascetic hairdo and holds a coiled rope in his right hand (fig. 21), while the other wears a princely crown with a *stūpa* emblem in it and rests his left hand on the scarf tied across his hip (fig. 20). One would be tempted to recognize in the princely *bodhisattva* the effigy of Maitreya, because scholars have identified the *stūpa* in the crown as being a distinctive sign of the *bodhisattva* Maitreya in later images from Kashmir dating to the ninth century, or in Pāla images from Bihar (Bhattacharya 1980, 106–107). However, as noted by Bhattacharya (Ibid.), no texts including later *sādhanas* mention this trait as distinctive of Maitreya, and this widely accepted identification appears to be based on a misinterpretation of a legend linked to the *bodhisattva* (Getty 1988, 23). In Gandhara during the Kuṣāṇa period the *bodhisattva* Maitreya was a prominent devotional figure represented in triads or independently. In that region he was not represented as a prince with a *stūpa* in his crown but rather with an ascetic hairdo and holding a water flask.[26] In Gandharan art there were no other princely *bodhisattvas* represented with that emblem. Bhattacharya (1980, 100–11) suggests that this iconographic trait was introduced for the first time in the caves of the western Deccan, as the

[24] It is very likely that *bodhisattva*s guarding the entrance to the shrine were painted in the antechamber of cave 3 at Aurangabad.

[25] As previously mentioned, holes for garland hooks are still visible to the left of the shrine at the beginning of the circumambulatory path.

[26] On Maitreya's representations in Gandharan art see Rhi (2006) and Luczanits (2005), while Filigenzi discusses more specifically images of this *bodhisattva* in the rock cut art of the Swat valley. Hypotheses on possible sources for Maitreya's iconography in Gandhara have been discussed in Taddei (2003d). In Gandharan sculpture it is the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara that cannot be clearly identified.

'tapering tenon' often appearing in the turban crest of Gandharan *bodhisattvas* may have been transformed into a *stūpa*.[27]

Maitreya occupied a prominent position in both *Nikāya* and *Mahāyāna* traditions, and thus his presence in the caves should not surprise us. In *Nikāya* Buddhism he has an especially important role as the future Buddha residing in Tuṣita heaven but who will eventually come to earth to preach the *dharma*. He is also the protagonist of an important *Mahāyāna* text, the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*, and one of the protagonists of early *sūtras* such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. In this particular text, known at Ajanta and Aurangabad, the *bodhisattva mahāsattva* Maitreya, along with Mañjuśrī, is one of the main interlocutors of the Buddha, but there is no description of their iconography.

The *stūpa* in the crown is the distinctive iconographic attribute of the *bodhisattva* that most often appears in tandem with Avalokiteśvara in the western Deccan caves. Thus we cannot exclude the possibility that such an emblem was intended to function as a visual counterpart to the Amitābha effigy in the headdress of Avalokiteśvara. Much as the Amitābha icon referred to the lineage of Avalokiteśvara, the *stūpa* in the crown may have indicated the *bodhisattva*'s lineage as Śākyamuni's successor, therefore making him identical with Maitreya. However, in some of the later caves at Aurangabad the same emblem appears in the crown of a *bodhisattva*, likely Vajrapāṇi, who holds a *vajra,* thus undermining the iconographic specificity of the *stūpa* in the headdress. The fact that Maitreya cannot be securely singled out in the *Mahāyāna* imagery from the caves of the western Deccan may be a reflection of the rather generic role played by this *bodhisattva* in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and other *Mahāyāna* texts. Cole (2005, 76) notes that the *Saddharmpuṇḍarīka* 'rewrites Maitreya's identity so that he isn't anyone of note' and suggests that the important role he plays in the pre-*Mahāyāna* tradition as the only successor and only son of Śākyamuni, is downplayed in the *Mahāyāna* school so as to make him an emblem for everyone. Thus, Maitreya was demoted to emphasize the universality of Śākyamuni's lineage and the accessibility of his path to salvation for all beings. Cole's observation may be especially useful in explaining the surprisingly small number of *bodhisattva* images that

[27] Filigenzi however notes that during the fourth and fifth centuries in Swat the *bodhisattva* Maitreya often wears a headdress with a central rounded crest reminiscent of Gandharan turbans.

can be securely associated with Maitreya at Aurangabad and the fact that a *bodhisattva* bearing the *vajra*, occasionally with a *stūpa* in his crown, replaces Maitreya in tandem with Avalokiteśvara.[28] Malandra (1993, 99–100), in her analysis of the *bodhisattva* images at Ellora, also notes that the *stūpa* emblem does not seem to have any specificity and that the *bodhisattva* with the *stūpa* in the headdress, possibly Maitreya, is most often represented with Avalokiteśvara only in the earlier Buddhist caves at the site, to be eventually replaced by Vajrapāṇi.[29]

4.4 The *Bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara in Cave 2

The identification of Avalokiteśvara as the ascetic *bodhisattva* in Aurangabad cave 2 is fairly certain (fig. 21). He has matted hair and loose curls falling on his shoulders, carries a small icon of Amitābha in his hair, holds a lotus, and wears an antelope skin across his shoulder. This *bodhisattva* must have been very popular in the western Deccan from the fifth century on, as he appears frequently at Ajanta, Aurangabad, Kanheri, and many other cave sites in the guise of a *dvārapāla*, a member of triads, and an independent deity often represented in the act of saving devotees from peril.[30] The Buddhist tradition links Avalokiteśvara to the Deccan. Xuan Zang alluded to the Deccan as the homeland of this *bodhisattva* who eventually took up residence in the north, and so did Tārānatha a few centuries later (Tucci 1948). Tucci (Ibid.) remarked that in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* the journey of Avalokiteśvara towards Mount Potalaka began in the south, in the region of Dhanyakara, probably to be identified with Dharanikota in Andhra Pradesh. Scholars have persistently noted the close association of Avalokiteśvara with mountains and caves, and in this sense the cult of the *bodhisattva* seems especially appropriate in the context of rock-cut Buddhist sites in

[28] Maitreya played a minor role in the later Buddhist tantric tradition; in the *sādhanamālā* there are only a couple of insignificant passages dedicated to the visualization of this Buddhist figure.

[29] For example caves 3, 6, and 8.

[30] Divakaran (1989) suggested that the cult of Avalokiteśvara in the western Deccan may have been introduced from the northwestern regions of the Subcontinent by a monastic diaspora that took place between the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth as a result of the anti-Buddhist attitudes of the Hūṇas. However, it is now well accepted that Buddhism continued to thrive under the Hūṇas and that the notion that these foreign invaders persecuted Buddhism is the result of historical misinterpretations.

the western Deccan.[31] Both De Mallmann (1948) and Schopen (2005) have suggested that the cult of Avalokiteśvara became well established only in the fifth century, with the full affirmation of *Mahāyāna*. Avalokiteśvara is a prominent figure in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*: the twenty-fourth chapter of this text is entirely dedicated to his role and transformations. To him is also dedicated the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, a *sūtra* composed possibly between the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth century in Kashmir, that portrays Avalokiteśvara as a Buddhist *iśvara* (Studholme 2002). While this is not the place to discuss the religious framework of the Avalokiteśvara cult, the main iconographic traits of this deity described in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* are represented in Aurangabad cave 2. This is how Avalokiteśvara is addressed in the eleventh chapter of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*: 'You who hold the beautiful lotus…I bow my head to the one who has the image of Amitābha…you who wear a crown of matted locks' (Studholme 2002, 130).[32]

The most interesting iconographic element associated with Avalokiteśvara in cave 2 at Aurangabad is the *pāśa*, the coiled rope the *bodhisattva* holds in his right hand. The *pāśa* is one of the attributes associated with Avalokiteśvara that is rarely represented in art. It is generally held by the tantric form of this *bodhisattva* known as Lokeśvara-Amoghapāśa (Bhattacharya 1987, 428; De Mallman 1948, 168; Donaldson 2001, 200–206; Leoshko 1985; Pal 1966, 1967), but very rarely Amoghapāśa appears as a two-armed, one-headed *bodhisattva*. The image in Aurangabad cave 2 is the first of its kind, and it seems unlikely that it is a tantric form of the *bodhisattva*, as the whole cave appears to be oriented towards *Mahāyāna* practices. It may be that since the noose is associated with restraint and captivity, the loose rope such as the one held by Avalokiteśvara at Aurangabad may hint at the salvation granted by this *bodhisattva*, the one who provides release

[31] For example, Waddel (1894) noted that Avalokiteśvara's sanctuaries are always located on mountains and that the etymology of his name as 'The Lord who looks down from on high' may be explained in this light. Tucci (1948, 506) added that the reference to the mountain in the context of Avalokiteśvara's myth may allude to the cathartic function of the deity; '…the spiritual palingenesis being projected here on a special plane; it is a soaring up from earth to heaven, represented by climbing of the mountain…'. De Mallmann (1948, 300–303) elaborated more specifically on how this *bodhisattva* is related to rocky caves.

[32] On the upper level of the cave 19 façade at Ajanta the princely *yakṣa*-like figure to the right of the window also seems to have a seated Buddha effigy in the diadem of his crown, turned to the side.

from spiritual captivity.[33] In a less metaphorical sense Avalokiteśvara in the twenty-fourth chapter of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* is the one who if invoked by prisoners can loosen their bonds and set them free (Kern 1884, XXIV, 408 and 414).[34]

The *pāśa* also appears in the mythology of the Hindu god Śiva, which had significant bearing on the Buddhist theology associated with Avalokiteśvara. Studholme (2002) has demonstrated that much of the material in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha sūtra*, which celebrates the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara, has been elaborated from purāṇic sources. In particular, he has been able to show that the six-syllable formula *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* is closely linked to the *Namaḥ Śivāya* of the god Śiva and that the cult of Avalokiteśvara shows patterns that are consistent with those characteristic of Śiva. In the third chapter of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, a Śaiva text that appears to be linked to the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, Śiva himself is indicated as the one who desires 'the welfare of all embodied ones fettered by the noose of worldly existence' (Studholme 2002, 65).[35] This metaphor applies very well to Avalokiteśvara, and in particular to the image of the *bodhisattva* holding the rope represented as an independent deity in Aurangabad cave 2. The loose rope visually encapsulates the salvific function of the *bodhisattva* as modeled on Śaiva sources. The presence of the rope in the hand of Avalokiteśvara at Aurangabad cave 2 anticipates later esoteric forms of the deity and attests to the conceptual and iconographic exchange that took place between the Śaiva tradition and the *Mahāyāna* cult of Avalokiteśvara in the area.

At the beginning of the sixth century Śaivism clearly thrived in the western Deccan, as so many rock-cut Śaiva monuments were established on the Konkan coast and on the plateau. There are unquestionable affinities between the *bodhisattva* images in Aurangabad cave 2 and the Śaiva images from Elephanta. For example, the image of Śiva

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[33] On the manifold symbolism of the rope in the Japanese Buddhist esoteric tradition see Saunders (1960, 172–73).

[34] In the Ṛg Veda it is said that the god Varuṇa, who shares some of the characteristic qualities of Rudra and whose distinctive attribute is a noose, in his merciful form removes sins like a loosened rope (Srinivasan 1983, 546).

[35] Some of the earliest images of Śiva on coins of the Kuṣāṇa rulers Huviṣka and Vāsudeva show the god with one head and two arms carrying a *pāśa* in his right hand and a trident in his left (Smith 1906, I, 74 and 84). In some cases Śiva with a *pāśa* is also shown as having flaming shoulders (Errington and Curtis 2007, 66–69). On Gupta coins the *pāśa* is generally found as an attribute of a female goddess represented on the reverse (see for example nos. 1–6RV, 1–8RV, 1–11RV, 1–12RV in Joshi 2007, 122, 124, 127, and 129).

as the lord of the *yogis* carved in the great cave (fig. 132) is noticeably akin to the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara in Aurangabad cave 2. Iconographically, the images of Śiva as an ascetic carrying the antelope skin, the *pāśa,* and the rosary closely resemble those of the ascetic *bodhisattva.* This interface is also well illustrated in the Parel stele, an unprovenanced sculpture dating to the beginning or middle part of the sixth century CE and generally interpreted as being Śaiva in nature (fig. 133). The figures represented in this sculpture, found in a suburb of modern Mumbai, do not display the third eye characteristic of Śiva and bear a startling resemblance to effigies of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara. It has been argued that the Great Cave at Elephanta and the Parel stele may all be related to the patronage of the early Kalacuri rulers, who were Śaiva and extended their power to Konkan at the beginning of the sixth century (Spink 2005). It is possible, therefore, that some of the programmatic and iconographic innovations that appear in cave 2 at Aurangabad may also be attributed to the new political, cultural, and artistic wave that took over parts of the western Deccan in the first half of the sixth century.

4.5 Early Kalacuri Patronage in the Western Deccan

In a series of early works, Spink (1968) demonstrated that the Konkan caves of Elephanta (fig. 156), Jogeshwari, and Mandapeshwar (fig. 140), as well as caves 29 and 21 at Ellora (fig. 158) can be related stylistically and conceptually to early Kalacuri patronage.[36] His arguments, especially those regarding the patronage of the Great Cave at Elephanta, have not been accepted by Khandalavala (1990), who maintains that a Maurya dynasty established in Konkan at the end of the sixth century was responsible for the establishment of this major cave.[37] However there is ample evidence of the early Kalacuri presence in Konkan during the middle of the sixth century. Mirashi (1963) has suggested that the early Kalacuris with Kṛṣṇarāja I took over the coastal region that the Traikūṭakas had controlled before them.[38] Spink (1968), who argues

[36] See also Spink (1967, 'Ellora's Earliest Phase' and 1967, *Ajanta to Ellora*). Regarding the Ellora caves, see Malandra (1993, 6).

[37] For a very concise but accurate survey of the chronological arguments about Elephanta, see Michell (2002, 96–97).

[38] The Traikūṭakas are mentioned in the incomplete verse 18 of Hariṣeṇa's inscription in Ajanta cave 16. They are also mentioned in a copperplate inscription from

for the historicity of the eighth chapter of the *Daśakumāracarita,* has also proposed that the early Kalacuris may have been linked to the family of Mahārāja Subandhu of Mahishmati in Malwa.[39] According to Mirashi (1963, xliv–xlvii), it was Kṛṣṇarāja's predecessor who extended the early Kalacuri power from Malwa to the Konkan coast and greatly expanded the power base of this dynasty. This is corroborated by many findings of silver coins issued by Kṛṣṇarāja in the Nasik district, in the Mumbai area, and especially on the island of Elephanta (Mirashi 1963, xliii).[40] Early Kalacuri copperplate inscriptions mentioning land grants have also been found in southern Gujarat and in the Nasik district.[41] The radius of diffusion of early Kalacuri coins and epigraphic material along with the ample silver coinage issued by Kṛṣṇarāja suggest that the early Kalacuris, much like many of their predecessors, tried to control both the coast and the inland production areas to gain the full benefits from Indian Ocean trade still going strong at the time. Cosmas Indicopleustes, whose work refers to Indian Ocean trade at around 550 CE, mentions southern Gujarat and the port of Kalyan near Kanheri as major commercial centers (McCrindle 1907, 366).

Kanheri, discussed earlier, that commemorates the gift of a *caitya* by a donor from Sind (Mirashi 1963, 29–32). In the Kanheri inscription the Traikūṭakas employed the Kalacuri era.

[39] The ancient city of Mahishmati has been identified by Mirashi (1963) with the modern Omkar Mandhata on the Narmada; however, archaeological excavations have shown that it was actually located at Maheshwar (Ghosh 1990, Vol. I, 146; Vol. II, 265–67). Mirashi (1963, xliv) also maintains that the last chapter of the *Daśakumāracarita* relates the events that determined the fall of the Vākāṭaka kingdom, and he proposes that the early Kalacuris in 525 took over the area of Mahishmati controlled by a Vākāṭaka scion. Spink (2005, 178) suggests that Kṛṣṇarāja may have been Māharāja Subandhu's grandson and the grandson-in-law of the Vākāṭaka emperor Hariṣeṇa. According to Spink (Ibid., 153), Māharāja Subandhu was responsible for the Bagh copperplates and the renovation of the Vākāṭaka Bagh caves, and in his early Barwani plates he began to use the Kalacuri era.

[40] Some Kṛṣṇarāja issues are closely modeled on earlier Kṣatrapa coins (Mirashi 1963, clxxxi). This is especially significant since the early Kalacuris seem to have followed the political strategy that the Kṣatrapas pursued many centuries before in attempting to gain control of parts of the western Deccan that were involved in long-distance trade as trade hubs, ports, or producers of goods destined for trade (Gokhale 1976, 236–38).

[41] The Abhona plates of Śaṅkaragaṇa and the Vadner plates of Buddharāja come from the Nasik district, the Sankheda plate of Śaṅkaragaṇa was discovered at Sanked in the Baroda district, and the Sarsavni plates of Buddharāja also come from the Baroda district (Mirashi 1963, 38–56). According to Mirashi (Ibid. xlvii), the Nagardhan plates found near Ramtek in the Nagpur district suggest that the early Kalacuris also controlled parts of Vidarbha, the homeland of the earlier Vākāṭaka rulers.

These are exactly the areas where the early Kalacuris left traces of their powerful presence.

In the western Deccan the involvement of political entities in remunerative Indian Ocean commercial activities corresponded to an immediate increase in patronage of rock-cut religious centers. The early Kalacuri rulers who professed Śaivism can be reasonably associated with the numerous Śaiva rock-cut monuments established in the region during the middle of the sixth century. Spink (1968) proposed that the Great Cave at Elephanta was the early Kalacuri imperial cave and that the convergence of effort on this major excavation may have been the indirect cause of the unfinished state of other Śaiva rock-cut monuments such as Jogeshwari and Mandapeshwar.[42] Śaṅkaragaṇa, the successor of Kṛṣṇarāja, extended and consolidated the early Kalacuri sphere of influence on the upper plateau in the area of Aurangabad, as indicated by the Abhona plates found in Nasik that record the donation by this king of a large amount of land in the district of Bhogavardana (modern Bhokardan);[43] his son Buddharāja was mentioned in a Cālukya inscription dated to 601 CE as being defeated by the king Maṇgaleśa (Fleet 1890). However, two later inscriptions from Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh attributed to Buddharāja place the Cālukya statement in a different perspective, suggesting that the early Kalacuris continued to be a historical presence into the beginning of the seventh century CE (Mirashi 1963, xliv).[44]

There are considerable difficulties in mapping the area controlled by the early Kalacuris in the middle of the sixth century: there was great political instability in the western Deccan, and the struggle for supremacy among different forces must have been fierce. From a purely art historical point of view, however, we can trace connections between

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[42] In the Abhona plates Saṅkaragaṇa declares his Śaiva faith and the Pāśupata devotion of his father Kṛṣṇarāja (Mirashi 1963, 42–43).

[43] The Abhona plates were issued from the king's camp in Ujjain and refer to him as ruling the land between the eastern and western seas (Mirashi 1963, 42–44). As we know, these kinds of epigraphic statements cannot be taken at face value: they may simply indicate that the early Kalacuris had an interest in expanding the western borders of their land.

[44] These are the Sarsavni plates, found in the Baroda district, issued by the king Buddharāja from his 'victorious camp' at Anandapura, in Gujarat, and the Vadner plates found in the Nasik district and issued by Buddharāja from his 'victorious camp' at Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh dated by Mirashi to 610. The gifts mentioned in these inscriptions consist of land located in the vicinity of Bharuch and Nasik, thus suggesting that these areas were still firmly in the hands of the early Kalacuris at the time.

the Śaiva rock-cut caves in Konkan, the later caves at Aurangabad, and the Brahmanical Śaiva caves at Ellora. Whether these links attest to the early Kalacuris having controlled this vast area and patronized the caves, or simply that artists and ideas moved across the region, working on both Śaiva and Buddhist rock-cut sites alike, is impossible to say, given the lack of epigraphic evidence. One hypothesis does not exclude the other: there may have been a movement of artists in connection with the early Kalacuri growth of power and patronage in the area. Some of the images we see in Konkan in the Great Cave at Elephanta, in Jogeshwari, and in the Parel stele, as well in Aurangabad, remind us of the figural idioms we see in the early sixth century sculpture from southern Gujarat and Mandasor in western Malwa.[45] The large *bodhisattva*s guarding the shrine in cave 2 at Aurangabad are examples. The princely *bodhisattva* with a *stūpa* in his crown is very similar to a *dvārapāla* image on a *toraṇa* pillar from Khilchipura in Mandasor dated by Schastok to the first quarter of the sixth century (Schastok 1985, fig. 98), while the ascetic Avalokiteśvara on the left echoes the simplicity of a Jain image in the well-known group of Akota bronzes found in modern Vadodara dated to the beginning of the sixth century.[46] These affinities can be explained only if we consider the early Kalacuris as the connection between southern Gujarat and eastern Malwa and the western Deccan regions of Konkan and Aurangabad.

Cave 2 at Aurangabad marks a radical change from early Vākāṭaka models in plan, iconographical program and visual idiom and is very much akin to the Śaiva rock-cut monuments associated with the early Kalacuris. The first and most visible innovation introduced in the post-Vākāṭaka caves at Aurangabad is the plan with central shrine and path for circumambulation (figs. 7, 8). Variations on this architectural format appear in many other parts of the Buddhist world where *Mahāyāna* was practiced. The central-shrine cave type was established in the area of Bamiyan where, aside from cave 13 where the colossal standing Buddha was, caves 1–H and 1–I with a seated Buddha in them had a corridor for circumambulation of the main image (Klimburg-Salter 1989). A variation of this type of plan was also adopted in China in the so-called pillar caves found in many localities of the Tarim Basin

[45] A detailed analysis of this connection is in Schastok (1985, 95–97).
[46] See Joshi 2007, 93.

as well as in Yungang (Hartel and Yaldiz 1982). Some of the caves having a central-shrine plan seem to include devotional imagery that attests to the influence of secular patrons.[47] In Sri Lanka sites with a central-shrine plan appear in sixth century Buddhist establishments. At sites like Pulyiankulama the *paṭimāghara*, or 'receptacle of the image of the Buddha', follows exactly the format of central shrine and circumambulatory path. Identified in Pāli as *pāsāda,* or palace, this type of shrine in Sri Lanka was central to suburban *pabbata vihāras,* rock-monasteries or mountain temples located in the outskirts of cities (Prematilleke and Silva 1968; Bhandaranayke 1974).

While the popularity of the central-shrine plan attests to the diffusion of common devotional practices across the Buddhist world, in India this layout was especially established in Hindu contexts. The plan of cave 2 at Aurangabad is identical to the Śaiva cave 21 at Ellora (fig. 160), which was linked to the Pāśupata cult and possibly to early Kalacuri patronage (Spink, 1967, 'Ellora's Earliest Phase'). The Pāśupatas placed great emphasis on circumambulation: it was considered one of their key religious practices, the fourth vow in their *vidhi* (Choubey 1997, 107). The introduction of this new type of plan at Aurangabad may have come directly from the local Pāśupata milieu. Aside from the cave plan, both Aurangabad cave 2 and Ellora cave 21 include images of the squatting goddess commonly identified as Lajjā Gaurī. At Aurangabad this goddess is represented a few times in the votive panels within an overarching Buddhist framework, while at Ellora cave 21 she is prominently depicted on the Nandi pedestal before the entrance of the cave (fig. 157).[48] The two *bodhisattva*s carved next to the entrance of the cave 2 shrine at Aurangabad also remind us of the imposing *dvārapālas* guarding the Śiva *liṅga* shrine in Ellora cave 29, a cave that on the basis of similarities with Elephanta has also been ascribed to the early Kalacuris.

Aurangabad cave 2 illustrates the visual idiom characteristic of the Śaiva caves linked to the early Kalacuris in the western Deccan. This is also the case for Dhokeshwara, a Śaiva rock-cut temple near Ahmadnagar. The development of this site seems to have been parallel to that of the late fifth and early sixth century caves at Aurangabad.[49] The only

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[47] The sculpture is discussed by Falco Howard 2006.

[48] Bolon (1992, 24–33) has noted that images of Lajjā Gaurī in the early Cālukya period are almost always found in temples associated with the Pāśupatas.

[49] The cave is near the village of Dhoke, about twenty miles west of Ahmadnagar.

two large pillars, originally part of a *maṇḍapa,* that remain at Dhoke reiterate the elaborate carving style of caves 1 and 3 at Aurangabad. It is possible that work at Dhoke may have started at the end of the Vākāṭaka period, possibly under the same rulers who were responsible for the rebirth of patronage at Aurangabad at the end of the fifth century. The layout of Dhokeshwara (fig. 134), with a central shrine and a wide corridor for circumambulation, is nearly identical to that of Aurangabad cave 2 (fig. 17), suggesting that work on the cave may have been completed sometime during the first half of the sixth century under the early Kalacuri influence in the region.[50] The majestic *dvārapāla*s guarding the entrance of the shrine at Dhokeshwara (fig. 135) can be related to those of Aurangabad cave 2, although less refined (fig. 20), and are as imposing as the guardians of the *liṅga* shrines in Ellora 29 and Elephanta (fig.156). In Dhoke also are images of the *Saptamātṛkās* and Gaṇeśa that can be compared to those appearing in the latest phase of activity at Aurangabad.

One last site to consider as participating in this early Kalacuri sculptural idiom is that of Mahur, in the Nandeed district (figs. 136, 137, 138). The Mahur cave is especially interesting because it combines the central-shrine plan with a large rectangular *maṇḍapa* of the type found at Mandapeshwar (figs. 136, 139). The presence of large *dvārapāla*s next to the shrine (fig. 137) and the Śaiva affiliation of the cave indicate that during the sixth century the early Kalacuri idiom spread well into the plateau. The Konkan caves of Mandapeshwar, Jogeshwari, and Elephanta may be seen as the sources of the new idiom that characterizes so many of the sixth century rock-cut excavations in the western Deccan, whether Hindu or Buddhist. Although large quantities of coins issued by the early Kalacuri king Kṛṣṇarāja have been found at Elephanta, supporting attribution of the Great Cave to the early Kalacuris, none of the surviving early Kalacuri inscriptions comes from the Konkan. Perhaps after Kṛṣṇarāja there was a shift in political interests towards the upland of the plateau, a shift that may have resulted in interruption of work at sites like Mandapeshwar and Jogeshwari and

[50] Tarr (1969) has suggested that the central plan with porch that became so established in the Hindu milieu may have roots in Ajanta *vihāras* 1 and 4. Jogeshwari and Mandapeshwar represent the first adaptations of this plan, which appears fully developed in Elephanta and Ellora. Tarr interprets caves 2 and 5 at Aurangabad as simplifications of these models.

the move of sculptors and emphasis from the coastal area to Aurangabad, Ellora, and other inland sites.

This uncertain political scenario suggests that warfare must have been the ordinary state of affairs at the beginning of the sixth century. The early Kalacuri fight for supremacy in Konkan and the inner areas of Maharashtra, along with the growing power of the Cālukya in the inner region of the plateau, must have created a perennial state of conflict in the western Deccan. The two major copperplate inscriptions by the early Kalacuri ruler Buddharāja from his encampments in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat show that a militaristic ethos must have dominated the early Kalacuri period. Davidson (2002) argues that in such an atmosphere rulers seeking legitimacy and power ended up supporting Śaiva religious groups, which may have better accommodated the values of the belligerent elites. This not only led to the decline of Buddhist patronage in India but also determined a change of trajectory within Buddhism in which the integration of purāṇic and especially Śaiva elements became crucial for the survival of this religious tradition. Aurangabad is one of the few Buddhist sites in the western Deccan that received continuous patronage through the sixth century and therefore illustrates step by step the dialogue and the mediation that took place among Buddhism, Śaivism, and the value system of the new feudal society. Not only were Śaiva traits incorporated in the iconography of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara in cave 2, but also emblems of the military elite.

Of particular interest is the innovative way of representing the lotus flowers held by the *bodhisattva*s in cave 2 (fig. 19). The lotus flowers with their long stems look like *dvajas*, on which a small Tathāgata sits in *padmāsana*, illustrating an iconography that is especially uncommon.[51] In Gupta art the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara is often represented holding a long-stemmed lotus flower in his left hand, but there is never a Buddha image on it. In the case of Aurangabad cave 2 the lotus flowers are turned into standards akin to those proudly displayed by victorious princes. The standard with the Buddha in *padmāsana* becomes the emblem of a spiritual conquest, much as the *dvaja* held by the king or prince becomes the emblem of a military victory. Gupta

[51] Such unusual iconography has been noted by De Mallmann (1948, 298) at Amaravati. It is also found in a small bronze from Swat probably close in date to the images of Aurangabad cave 2 (Pal 1978, 117, pl. 70).

gold coins offer excellent examples of how *dvajas* functioned in the context of royal iconography. At Aurangabad a visual idiom so highly charged with military connotations came to be manipulated in a Buddhist context to express the notion of the *bodhisattva*'s victory over a mystic domain. Only a period dominated by warfare, such as the sixth century, when the early Kalacuris fought for control of vast parts of the western Deccan, could have produced such imagery.

To summarize, I believe that it is possible to safely ascribe cave 2 at Aurangabad to the early Kalacuris. While Aurangabad cave 3, sponsored at the end of the fifth century by local feudatories, reflects the pre-existing Vākāṭaka models, cave 2, established at the beginning of the sixth century, is more oriented to the future. It reflects the emergence of a new order and the religious concerns of secular devotees, and it indicates the degree of exchange between developed *Mahāyāna* tradition and the ever growing Śaiva communities in the region.

4.6 Śaivism, the Pāśupatas, and their Impact on Buddhism in the Western Deccan

The early Kalacuris strongly supported Śaiva ideology: in their inscriptions they referred to themselves as *paramamāheśvara* or 'fervent devotees of Maheśvara (Śiva)' and openly declared their Pāśupata faith.[52] This emphasis on Śaivism must have had a major impact on the Buddhist tradition in the western Deccan and was undoubtedly influential in planting the seeds that led to the flowering of esoteric systems. Aside from cave plans and stylistic elements, the triumph of the cult of Avalokiteśvara and the emergence of complex *Mahāyāna* and proto-tantric iconographies in the eastern group of caves at Aurangabad had something to do with the success of Śaiva cults and the Pāśupata sect under the early Kalacuris. For one thing, Buddhism in the region had to contend for patronage with Śaivism, which, according to Davidson (2002, 86), better accommodated the values of the new feudal society. The competition for patronage must have increased to the extent that the Pāśupatas 'appropriated aspects of Buddhist nomenclature

[52] In the Abhona plates Kṛṣṇarāja is described as a Pāśupata since birth, and in the Vadner plates Buddharāja's queen is also said to be a Pāśupata (Mirashi 1963, 42 and 51).

and iconography for their own use' and ended up by incorporating in their support base social groups on the margins that previously were involved in Buddhism (Davidson 2002, 85). The points of contact among these two traditions are significant. Asceticism and renunciation were recognized as important steps along the path to liberation in both Buddhist and Pāśupata traditions.[53] Scholars have noted that some of the mechanisms determining the transfer of merit in the Pāśupata doctrine also appear in a passage of the *Saddharmapuṇḍārika sūtra*, where they are manipulated and transformed to conform to the selfless Buddhist ethics (Hara 2002, 136–7). Some of the antinomic practices embraced by the Pāśupatas and described in the *Nakulīśa Pāśupata Darśana* have similarities to those propounded in the Buddhist esoteric tradition that began to take shape in India around the seventh century (Hara 2002, 215–6).[54]

We should not exclude the possibility that the 'osmosis' between Buddhism and the Śaiva Pāśupata creed may have taken place in the geographic area discussed here, since much of the textual and artistic evidence on the diffusion of the Pāśupatas points to southern Gujarat and western Madhya Pradesh as being major centers for this religious tradition.[55] Unfortunately, it is impossible to date the emergence of the Pāśupata sect and its founder Lakulīśa, who is described in the *Purāṇas* as an incarnation of Śiva. Bisschop (2008, 46) states however that the first references to Lakulīśa as an incarnation of Śiva appear in the *Skanda Purāṇa*. The name Lakulīśa seems to refer to the club

[53] On the Pāśupatas see Bisschop (2006), Chakraborti (1970), Dyczkowski (1988), Hara (2002), Lorenzen (1972), and Oberhammer (1991).

[54] The *Nakulīśa Pāśupata Darśana* remains one of the main sources on Pāśupata religiosity. This chapter was included in the *Sarvadarśana Saṁgraha,* ascribed to Sāyaṇa Mādhava and dated to the fourteenth century (Choubey 1987, 68). When describing the key elements that enhance the attainment of knowledge and the power of renunciation, this text lists the *guhā-deśa*, a hidden retreat or, more literally, a cave as being an ideal location for a practitioner (Hara 2002, 205). This reference is especially interesting in light of the Pāśupata association of many of the sixth century Śaiva caves in Konkan.

[55] The *Skanda Purāṇa*'s topography of Śaiva sites lists centers with close ties to the Aurangabad region: Karohana, Gokarna, and Hariscandra. Karohana (modern Karvan in Guajarat) was located northeast of Bharuch, north of the river Narmada on the way to Ujjain, and had a major Pāśupata presence. Gokarna is identical with the modern pilgrimage center in the Kanara district while Hariscandra can be identified with Harishcandragarh, a mountain in the western Ghats near Shivneri in Junnar. This last location was also associated with the Pāśupatas (Bisschop 2006, 202-203). Pāśupata temples existed also in Sind (Maclean 1997, 14–18).

always held by this figure, and as related in the *Viśvakarmāvatāra Vāstuśāstra*, Lakulīśa should always be represented in *dhyānāsana,* with an erect penis and holding a citron in his right hand and a club in his left (Choubey 1987, 71). The town of Karvan in Gujarat is referred to as the birthplace of Lakulīśa, and the Pāśupata cult became especially strong in Lata, the region between the mouth of the Tapi and Narmada rivers which historically had very close ties to the Ajanta range (Choubey 1987, 73–77). Kauṇḍinya's commentary to the *Pāśupatasūtra* states that Lakulīśa went to Ujjain where he initiated his first pupil Kuśika (Bisschop 2006, 45). The Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang says that in the seventh century large Pāśupata constituencies existed in Lata, Malwa, Avanti, and the area of Kutch (Beal 1906, ii, 261, 276–9). Xuan Zang reported that in the city of Maheshwar, ancient Mahishmati on the northern bank of the river Tapi not far from the Ajanta range and Aurangabad, there were many Pāśupata temples that received support from the local king (Beal 1906, ii, 271). That this city was a stronghold of Śaiva asceticism is confirmed by the *Daśakumāracarita*. In the eighth chapter of that work, it is told that the evil prince Viśruta managed to enter undisturbed the city of Mahishmati because he was disguised as a Kāpālika, a Śaiva ascetic closely related to the Pāśupatas (Spink 1983, 261).[56] In Konkan also, some of the earliest epigraphic references to the Pāśupatas can be found. According to Bisschop (2006, 47), a group of inscriptions from Padana Hill near Kanheri mention a saint called Kauśikeya and a *siddha* called Musala, which can be identified with figures in the Pāśupata lineage. These epigraphs have been dated to the first and third centuries, respectively, of the current era, so it is possible that they allude to sages incorporated later in the Pāśupata tradition. If that is the case, then Konkan was an important center for the formation of this particular Śaiva sect.

Most of the earliest images that can be unquestionably identified as representing Lakulīśa come from the western regions of India. Among the earliest is an effigy represented over the portal of the early Kalacuri cave of Jogeshwari in Konkan, likely dating to the beginning of the sixth century.[57] The image of Lakulīśa that appears in Ellora cave

[56] On the Kāpālikas see Lorenzen (1972).

[57] Collins (1988, 121) has proposed a Pāśupata affiliation for the Great Cave at Elephanta. It has also been suggested that the Parel stele may have been the product of Pāśupata religiosity (Choubey 1987, 127). A very interesting image from this time period comes from the site of Karvan in Gujarat where Lakulīśa is represented

29, another early Kalacuri cave, shows how quickly the Pāśupatas absorbed iconographic models established in the Buddhist caves of the region (fig. 142). Lakulīśa has an ascetic hairdo very similar to that of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara and holds a *mālā* in his right hand; he sits in *dhyānāsana* on a lotus flower held by *nāga*s flanked by devotees, following the imagery of Buddhist votive panels seen in cave 2 at Aurangabad.[58] It is possible that the iconography of Lakulīśa seated in *dhyānāsana* on the lotus flower that became canonical in later times may have been developed right at the beginning of the sixth century in the western Deccan caves as the Pāśupatas, competing for patronage with Buddhism, adapted the Buddhist visual language for their own purposes. In the seventh and eighth centuries Lakulīśa's representations became more iconographically fixed: he began to appear most often in a meditating posture and sitting on a lotus flower, in Śaiva temples in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and western Madhya Pradesh, especially at the site of Mandasor.[59] The importance of the Pāśupata cult in these areas, where commercial activities and craft industries related to trade were historically strong and where groups of foreigners of non-Brahmanical origin may have lingered with the Huṇās, confirms that the Pāśupatas attracted the patronage of social groups that had previously supported Buddhism and opened the door to the final decline of this religion in western India.

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emerging from a *liṅga*. The cult of the Śiva *liṅga* was very important in the Pāśupata tradition.

[58] The image of Lakulīśa may have not have been included in the original plan of Elloza cave 29 but added shortly after the cave was made. In Bhubaneshwar, Orissa, a small image of Lakulīśa on the western façade of the Paraśurāmeśvara temple dated to the seventh century even shows Lakulīśa with an *uṣṇīṣa* and long earlobes in a visual framework that emulates Buddhist images (Choubey 1987, pl. 38). The large image of Śiva as the *Mahāyogi* flanking the north entrance of the Great Cave at Elephanta (fig. 132) is also modeled on Buddhist imagery.

[59] An interesting stele from Afzalpur dated by Schastok (1985, fig. 101) to 530 CE and now in the Mandasor fort, shows a standing Śiva with erect penis and an *āyudhapuruṣa* holding a club. This image is stylistically very much akin to the Śaiva figures in the Great Cave at Elephanta and the Parel stele, and could very well be among the earliest images of Lakulīśa in Mandasor.

4.7 Cave 5 at Aurangabad: The Return of the *Padmāsana* Buddha in the Main Shrine

Cave 5 at Aurangabad is a small unit perched above cave 4a near the *caitya* hall (fig. 4, 7, 44). Its inconvenient position can be explained only if we assume that another early cave existed beneath cave 5, right where the modern staircase reaches this group of excavations. Cave 5 is a small, unfinished unit, which at some point was whitewashed and transformed into a Jain cave (figs. 47, 48). The layout of this cave follows the format of Aurangabad cave 2 (figs. 46, 17): a central shrine surrounded by a corridor for circumambulation and a small *maṇḍapa* with two side cells, now collapsed. In an effort to use the small space available as efficiently as possible and in light of the poor quality of the rock in this particular area, the excavators seem to have reduced sculpture to a minimum; for example, this small cave does not include majestic *dvārapāla*s guarding the shrine as in cave 2. The whole unit is unfinished and has many irregularities. Most notably, the circumambulatory path is not all on the same level; it seems as if excavators working simultaneously on the left and the right side of the corridor eventually found themselves at different heights behind the shrine.

Few large votive panels decorate the walls of this unit (fig. 47). They are very similar in terms of iconography to those in cave 2, and they occupy the most visible positions in the unit, including the sides of the shrines where large *bodhisattva* sculptures were usually carved. The most striking feature of this cave is that the main image consists of a Buddha in *dhyānāsana* and *dhyānamudrā* in the shrine (fig. 48). The Buddha's throne is also very simple: no back and no ornaments except for two flying figures above and the usual two *bodhisattva*s flanking the main image. The Buddha in the shrine has a very simple look: he has snail-curl hair and wears a *saṃghatī* fitting closely to his body and covering both shoulders. His bent arms rest on his crossed legs in the position appropriate to meditation. This image type represents an *unicum* in the post-Vākāṭaka caves of the area where the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā* is the iconographic model of choice for main images in cave shrines. The *dhyānāsana* Buddha type appeared early on at Ajanta in cave 1 and lower cave 6, where it displays the teaching gesture, not the one associated with meditation in which both hands rest on the crossed legs. Spink (2007) has dated the introduction of the *dhyānāsana* image type at Ajanta to the very beginning of the Vākāṭaka activity at the site. According to his

observations, only later was the *dhyānāsana* type supplanted by the *bhadrāsana*.[60] The main Buddha in meditation in Aurangabad cave 5 is not to be related to earlier sculptural examples at Ajanta. Rather, it bears closer similarities to one of the Buddhas in *dhyānāsana* and *dhyānamudrā* carved on the right wall of the so-called Brahmanical cave in the eastern group of caves at Aurangabad (fig. 53). The Buddha in this cave, although not carved in the main position on the back wall, is also a rather large figure, represented in meditation. Much like the cave 5 Buddha, this figure wears a monastic robe covering both shoulders and fitting close to the body that emphasizes the broad shoulders and the small waist. Both images display similar facial shapes and have very long earlobes and an almost identically oval halo. Images this size of *dhyānāsana* Buddhas in *dhyānamudrā* were not commonly found in the Buddhist caves of the western Deccan until much later, when they were placed in the maṇḍalic units of Ellora cave 11.

How are we to interpret the appearance of the meditating Buddha in the shrine of cave 5 at Aurangabad? The explanation could be very simple, as Spink (2007) suggested in many instances for Ajanta: there was not enough space and not enough rock left to carve a massive *bhadrāsana* Buddha in *dharmacakramudrā* in cave 5, and thus the patrons opted for a less cumbersome image of the Buddha in meditation. This major iconographic change, perhaps implemented for practical reasons, may also betray the signs of an increasing exchange between the Buddhists and the Śaiva tradition in the western Deccan during the post-Vākāṭaka period. The popularity of the Pāśupata sect, which placed a new emphasis on the salvific role of asceticism and meditation, may have directed attention towards an iconographic type that had been for many years considered inappropriate for main Buddha images. The royal connotations that once empowered the Vākāṭaka Buddhas in the Ajanta shrine had been transferred to Śaiva imagery in the new feudal political horizon. Such an iconographic reappropriation may have betrayed the Buddhist necessity to gain support in a world increasingly dominated by Śaiva faith. This issue also brings up the question of the dating of Aurangabad cave 5. This was the last cave to be added to the western group, and it is very likely that it was under completion when the eastern caves were being started.

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[60] According to Spink's chronology, the Buddhas were carved in *dhyānāsana* until 477 CE (Spink 2007, 396).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE EASTERN GROUP OF CAVES

Caves 2 and 5 at Aurangabad used up all the suitable rock in the immediate vicinity of the early apsidal hall. Thus, the patrons who continued to support the site selected a nearby slope to the east for the establishment of five more caves (figs. 5, 6, 8). Caves 6 and 7 are closely related in layout and religious ideology to caves 2 and 5 of the western group. They are the only caves of the eastern group that appear to be almost complete. Caves 8 and 9 and the Brahmanical cave, which are all unfinished, have a completely different atmosphere. It is likely that work on the eastern group at Aurangabad continued throughout the sixth century CE but with a progressive weakening of patronage until work ceased at the beginning of the seventh century. The two aborted excavations adjacent to cave 9 mark the very end end of rock-cutting activities in the eastern group (fig. 8). In imagery, the eastern caves represent a significant step towards the formation of new iconographies linked to *Vajrayāna* Buddhism. The overwhelming presence of female figures in these units marks the beginning of a trend that would find full expression in rituals associated with esotericism at a slightly later time.

The spatial organization of the new caves 6 and 7 is the outgrowth of central-shrine caves 2 and 5, with a noticeable addition of cells along the circumambulatory path (figs. 7, 8). The presence of cells in caves 6 and 7 is noteworthy because this is the first instance of such structures at Aurangabad. In cave 6 there are three cells on either side of the hall, and the two opening onto the back wall were made into small subsidiary shrines with sculptures. Only four cells in cave 6 have sockets for doors and latches (fig. 54: clockwise, the first cell on the left side, the left subsidiary shrine, and the first and last cells on the right side). In cave 7 there are four cells on the sides and two on the back that were also turned into small subsidiary shrines. In this cave only the cells on the right side have sockets for a door latch (fig. 64). Whether all these cells were meant to be inhabited by monks is impossible to say. They may have been created for other purposes—meditation, for example. However, the fact that so much monastic space was integrated into

the sacred area suggests that during the sixth century a significant monastic component existed at Aurangabad. This is confirmed by the presence in the eastern group of a cave that, although incomplete, was clearly intended exclusively for residential purposes. This is cave 8, an unfinished unit carved up high above the level of cave 7 (fig. 90). It has roughed-out cells that must have been used only briefly, if ever, at the very end of the occupation of the site, or afterwards by other occupants who took advantage of these rock-cut structures (fig. 91).[1]

5.1 *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara: A Traditional *Mahāyāna* Icon in Cave 7

Aṣṭamahābhaya Avalokiteśvara carved in the porch of Aurangabad cave 7 is one of the icons traditionally associated with *Mahāyāna* and tremendously popular in the western Deccan (fig. 71). Avalokiteśvara as the saviour from the eight great perils had been, since the end of the fifth century, an independent cult figure at Ajanta.[2] Only at Aurangabad, however, is the *aṣṭamahābhaya* icon completely integrated in the iconographic program of a Buddhist cave; it is prominently carved in the porch by the entrance door where normally one would find a *dvārapāla bodhisattva*. *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara in Aurangabad cave 7 is colossal, almost three meters tall, and its style recalls the majestic sculptures in the Great Cave at Elephanta (fig. 156). The savior *bodhisattva* is in *abhāyamudrā*, as appropriate for his role, and in his left hand he holds a long-stemmed lotus flower. Two small Buddhas in *dhyānāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā* are represented at the top left and right of Avalokiteśvara, possibly as a reference to the Buddha fields associated with him. Eight vignettes, four on each side of the standing *bodhisattva,* depict the eight great perils challenging the devotees, and each of the vignettes includes a small image of Avalokiteśvara holding a lotus and flying to rescue those in danger (figs. 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78 and 79). Avalokiteśvara leaves behind

[1] Next to the staircase leading to the upper level of cave 8 there is a deep-cut recess, which suggests that the second storey of this cave could have been sealed off. Perhaps this unit was occupied at a time when the site was in decline and possibly unsafe.

[2] Images of *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara at Ajanta are painted in cave 2 and in upper caves 4, 17, and 11 and are sculpted in caves 4, 20, and 26. This type of iconography is also found at Kanheri in caves 2, 41, and 90 and later on at Ellora in caves 3 and 4. De Mallmann (1948, 139) recognized this icon also in cave 3 at Badami.

ribbons fluttering in the air.[3] In his hairdo he displays an emblem that, although not always discernible, consists of a small *stūpa* and not the seated Buddha one would expect.[4]

The story of Avalokiteśvara saving his devotees from the eight great perils is found in a number of *Mahāyāna* sources, but it is the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* that most likely inspired the representation at Aurangabad. Schopen (2005, 294) has demonstrated that this particular text was known and illustrated in the Ajanta paintings in the fifth century.[5] The twenty-fourth chapter of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* elaborates on the dangerous scenarios represented in Aurangabad cave 6 in which Avalokiteśvara, if properly invoked, rescues his devotees.[6] By calling the name of this *bodhisattva*, merchants at sea can be saved from shipwrecks, and those traveling in caravans can be protected from assaults of thieves. Avalokiteśvara has the ability of saving those who are condemned to capital punishment and those threatened by the magic powers of goblins; he can also fulfill the wishes

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[3] These ribbons look very different from those generically associated with images of flying attendants in the caves: they are triangular and flutter upward from behind the shoulders of the *bodhisattva*, in a manner that is strikingly reminiscent of the fluttering scarves as symbols of royalty represented on Sasanian silver plates and gems.

[4] This is an excellent example of the great fluctuation in *bodhisattva* iconography at Aurangabad and more generally in the caves of the western Deccan during the fifth and sixth centuries. De Mallmann (1948, 141) also notes that the presence of Amitābha in the hairdo of Avalokiteśvara was not a fixed iconographic mark in the post-Gupta period.

[5] The visual references to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* found at Ajanta and Aurangabad suggest that this text played more than a marginal role in the Ajanta range between the fifth and the sixth century. It may be an interesting coincidence that in the *Gaosengzhuan* the monk Dharmagupta, who in 610 CE translated, together with Jñānagupta, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* into Chinese, was originally from Lata, the area between the mouth of the rivers Tapi and Narmada that historically had close ties with the Ajanta-Aurangabad region. On the biography of Dharmagupta as related in the *Gaosengzhuan,* see Kuwayama (2006, 122–23).

[6] This *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* chapter, entitled *Samantamukha-parivarto nāma avalokiteśvaravikurvaṇa-nirdeśa* or 'The Exposition of the Miraculous Transformations of Avalokiteśvara, the One Who Faces in All Directions' seems to have had a life of its own. However, Schopen has noted that by the time this account became known at Ajanta it had already become a part of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* (Schopen 2005, 287–91). The chapter was included in the first Chinese translation of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka,* done in 286 CE. This version only contained the description of the miracles in prose that appears at the beginning of the chapter (De Mallmann 1948, 93). Schlingloff (1987, 177–78) also translated a passage from a manuscript of the *Buddhist Yoga* treatise, found in Kyzil, in which a monk practitioner identifies himself in a vision with Avalokiteśvara saving his devotees from dangers. Schlingloff argues that the painting of *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara at Ajanta therefore may have functioned as a meditation guide.

of women desiring offspring (Kern 1884, XXIV, 406–409). The twenty-fourth chapter ends with a litany in verse, in part a repetition of the same miraculous interventions described at the beginning of the chapter, in part a list of more prodigious rescues: Avalokiteśvara protects those thrown off mountains, those hit by rocks or by a sword, those who are about to be executed or imprisoned, those who are victims of witchcraft or threatened by ghosts, and those who are surrounded by frightful beasts and snakes (Kern 1884, XXIV, 413–15).[7]

From the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* it appears that the cult of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara was especially widespread among merchants and travelers who voyaged by sea or land, among those who challenged the law and among women—a cross-section of some of the social groups possibly involved in the patronage of icons of *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara in the western Deccan.

Merchants must have occupied a special place in the ranks of those devoted to Avalokiteśvara. The invocations listed in the twenty-fourth chapter of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* include a rather long description of a shipwreck in the waters of Sri Lanka, referred to in the translated text as the Island of Giantesses (Kern 1884, XXIV, 406–407):

> In case, young man of good family, many hundred thousand myriads of *koṭis* of creatures, sailing in a ship on the ocean, should see their bullion, gold, gems, pearls, lapis lazuli, conch shells, stones (?), corals, emeralds, 'Musaragalvas', red pearls and other goods lost, and the ship by a vehement, untimely gale cast on the Island of Giantesses, and if in that ship a single being implores Avalokiteśvara, all will be saved from that Island of Giantesses.[8]

Interestingly some of these precious items, such as gold, lapis lazuli, emeralds, 'Musaragalvas', and corals that the *Saddharampuṇḍarīka* mentions as being transported on a ship that is wrecked in the waters off Sri Lanka, are also enumerated in another passage of the same *sūtra*

[7] Verses twenty-nine to thirty-three of the twenty-fourth chapter dealing with the apparition of Amitābha are not in the Chinese translation done in 601 by Dharmagupta and Jñānagupta, but only in the later eleventh century Nepalese Sanskrit manuscript (De Mallmann 1948, 93).

[8] The passage ends with the following sentence: 'For that reason, young man of good family, the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara is named Avalokiteśvara'. Kern notes that the meaning of the name Avalokiteśvara as being 'the lord of view, of regard' can be compared to the epithet of Śiva as *Dṛṣṭigūru* or Master of View (Kern 1884, 407, note 2). Here seems to be yet another point of contact between Avalokiteśvara and the Hindu god Śiva.

as being the 'seven precious treasures' forming a *stūpa* that magically appears to the *bodhisattva* Mahāpratibhāna.[9] As noted by Xinru Liu (1987), the 'seven precious treasures' mentioned in *Mahāyāna* texts consist essentially of precious items traded along the Silk Road or the Indian Ocean. Liu also remarks that the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* contains many references to trade and traders to the point that in this text 'the symbolic vehicle which carries the worshipper across to enlightenment is a bullock cart made of the seven jewels with additional silk mattresses to make it comfortable' (Liu 1987, 97–102). The devotion to Avalokiteśvara that is central to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* must have been especially strong among traders who plied the Indian Ocean. The *Kāraṇḍavyūha,* a major *Mahāyāna sūtra* devoted to Avalokiteśvara, also includes significant references to Sri Lanka as a business destination.[10]

The popularity of the *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara cult in many western Deccan rock-cut sites between the end of the fifth century and during the sixth indicates that trade continued to be a main source of revenue for these Buddhist sites and that Indian Ocean commerce was still thriving at the time. Cave 7 at Aurangabad, the only cave in the western Deccan where an icon of *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara is prominently positioned in the original iconographic plan, may have been supported by communities involved in international trade. The image of a shipwreck in the bottom left part of the *aṣṭamahābhaya* icon in cave 7 (fig. 72) indicates this possibility. If we assume that the sequence of miraculous interventions of the *bodhisattva* was to be read in a clockwise direction, then the visual litany, much like the account of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka,* opens with the shipwreck, placing special emphasis on this incident. A boat and its occupants are represented with great attention to detail. The ship is not just a plain vessel but has two masts and it would seem that the sculptors had direct knowledge of this specific type of boat. Schlingloff (1976, 19) notes 'That the multiple masts did not stem from the artists' imagination is proved by literary reports which also mention three masts. Andhra coins dating

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[9] The seven precious substances of this *stūpa* are: 'gold, silver, lapis lazuli, Musāragalva, emerald, coral, and Karketana-stone' (Kern 1884, XI, 228).

[10] In the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara as a Brahmin goes to Sri Lanka. The same text says that Śākyamuni in a prior rebirth was the king Simhala who visited Sri Lanka with a retinue of five hundred merchants (Studholme 2002, 133 and 135–36).

to the beginning of the current era as well as a relief from Aurangabad show two-masters whose masts are supported by stays (support ropes fore-and-aft)'.[11] Since ships with multiple masts were used for ocean sailing, the one depicted in the *aṣṭamahābhaya* at Aurangabad was surely intended to represent a vessel employed in Indian Ocean trade. This is confirmed by the attire of one of the three persons on the ship: the only figure that is still intact wears a pointed cap and a caftan, indicating that he is a Sasanian or a Central Asian merchant. Another foreigner, with a pointy beard and a mustache, probably also a reference to a man coming from the Iranian world or Central Asia, appears in the same *aṣṭamahābhaya* composition in the vignette above the shipwreck, in a scene that may represent imprisonment and punishment (fig. 73). The hands of this bearded figure seem to be tied to a wooden pole; below him is another figure wearing a costume that is clearly not Indian, consisting of a mantle clasped on the left shoulder. This scene could illustrate the following passage related in the twenty-fourth chapter of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (Kern 1884, XXIV, 407–408):

> If some creatures, young men of good family, shall be bound in wooden or iron manacles, chains or fetters, be guilty or innocent, then those manacles, chains or fetters shall give way as soon as the name of the *Bodhisattva* Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara is pronounced. Such, young men of good family, is the power of the *Bodhisattva* Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara.

The representation in Aurangabad cave 7 of foreigners and traders linked to the Iranian world in the context of a shipwreck should not be overlooked. It suggests that the Aurangabad region in the sixth century, much as in previous times, continued to be involved in international trade by supplying goods for the Indian Ocean markets. It also implies that at this time Sasanians or Central Asian merchants were doing business in Indian ports and probably were a common sight in Konkan, to the point of being perceived as the prototypical sea merchants in Indian trade circuits.

During the first half of the sixth century the Sasanian empire under Khosrow I attained considerable power. The Iranian borders were secured and expanded and the Sasanians became heavily involved on the international front. Three Persian embassies were sent to China

[11] See also Deloche (1996, 205).

between 518 and 531 CE, and a truce with Byzantium ensured the Sasanians a key position in international business on both the Silk Road and the Indian Ocean. Archaeological excavations and surveys in Iran along the Persian Gulf shore have revealed the existence of important Sasanian maritime settlements. At the site of Siraf, for example, what appears to be a Sasanian fort and related buildings have been discovered beneath the Islamic layers. Artifacts from these buildings include red polished ware from Gujarat dated by the excavators to the fifth and sixth centuries, a fourth century Roman coin of Theodosius I struck in Alexandria, and Roman glass from the fifth century. These items indicate Sasanian involvement in east-west trade on the Indian Ocean. Surveys along the same shore of the Persian Gulf have revealed the existence of one of the largest Sasanian coastal settlements, at the site of Rishahr south of Siraf, likely a major pearl market between the fifth and seventh centuries, according to a version of the *Geography* attributed to the Armenian Moses of Chorene. In the sixth century the Sasanians also used the Omani coast as a departure point for commercial vessels sailing to India; recent archaeological work in this region has brought to light a few remarkable Sasanian sites on the coast. One of them was the settlement of Suhar, established in the first century CE and thriving throughout the Ummayad period, where Indian red polished ware has been found in layers from the foundation up to the Sasanian period. At Suhar, archaeologists have noticed an increasing presence of imported ceramics similar to those found at Shamalaji in Gujarat and Bambhore in Sind beginning with the third century CE. Such findings suggest that in the Sasanian period an especially close connection existed between the Oman coast and major sites in Gujarat and Sind (Kevran 1996, 37–58).

The paramount source for information on Indian Ocean trade in the sixth century remains the *Christian Topography* compiled around 550 CE by an Alexandrian merchant later identified as Cosmas Indicopleustes. This work not only speaks of Iranian merchants plying the Indian Ocean but also describes the town of Kalyan in Konkan as one of the main trade centers. We don't know if the author himself ever traveled across the sea, but his account offers a vivid picture of the intensity of Indian Ocean commercial exchange during the first half of the sixth century. Cosmas mentions that Persian ships and Axumite vessels from Adulis backed by the Byzantines sailed for profitable business towards Sri Lanka, which was at the time a busy hub

for goods moving to and from the Far East, Southeast Asia, India, and the West (McCrindle 1847, 366 and 169–70).[12] The involvement of Iranian merchants in Sri Lanka must have been great enough to induce some Persian authors to claim that under Khosrow I (531–578 or 579) a Sasanian fleet conquered Sri Lanka.[13] To counteract this Sasanian hegemony of Indian Ocean trade, the Byzantine emperor Justinian (525–565 CE) tried to back the Axumite traders (Whitehouse 1996, 346). About Sri Lanka, the *Christian Topography* reports (McCrindle 1847, 365–66):

> The island as it is in a central position is much frequented by ships from all parts of India and from Persia and Ethiopia. And from the remotest countries, I mean Tzinitza and other trading places, it receives silk, aloes, cloves, sandalwood and other products and these again are passed into marts on this side such as Male, where pepper grows, and to Calliana which exports copper and sesame-logs and cloth for making dresses, for it is also a great place for business. And to Sindu also where musk and Castor is procured, and *androstachy*, and to Persia and the Homerite country and to Adule. And the island receives imports from all these marts which we have mentioned and passes them on to remote ports, while at the same time exporting its own produce in both directions. Sindhu is the frontier of India, for the river of India, that is, the Phison, which discharges into the Persian Gulf, forms the boundary between Persia and India. The most notable places of trade in India are these: Sindhu, Orrhotha, Callian, Sibor.

From this source it is clear that the port of Kalyan in the Mumbai area was an emporium of great significance at the beginning of the sixth century when Cosmas assembled his information. That cotton is listed by Cosmas as one of Kalyan's major exports means that Aurangabad and the surrounding areas were at the forefront of the mercantile scene at this time. The cotton shipped in Kalyan was most probably produced in the Ajanta-Aurangabad region, since, as discussed earlier, black cotton soil ideal for the production of this fiber is abundant on the upper regions of the plateau surrounding the Ajanta range. It can

[12] Cosmas also says that in Sri Lanka Byzantine gold coins coming on the ships from Adulis were preferred to Persian silver coins brought in by Persian merchants. On this issue see De Romanis (1997, 186–88). Previously, Roman coins were common in Sri Lanka (Bopearachchi 1996, 71).

[13] Whitehouse (1996, 345) cites Tabari, Hamza, and Tha'alibi. While the Sasanian conquest of Sri Lanka seems to be hyperbole, the Byzantine historian Procopius confirms that the Sasanians were aggressive merchants in India, buying entire cargo loads from ships and leaving their competitors empty-handed.

be argued that the benefits from this trade percolated in the area of the Aurangabad caves. Another major export item from Kalyan mentioned in the *Christian Topography* is copper. This reference is especially interesting if we take into account the large quantities of copper coins issued by the early Kalacuri kings at the beginning of the sixth century, when they extended their sphere of influence from Malwa into Konkan, the Nasik area, and the Aurangabad region. Especially relevant is the finding of a very large number of copper coins issued by the king Kṛṣṇarāja on the island of Elephanta in the bay of Mumbai, not distant from the ancient port of Kalyan (Ghokale 1976, 89–91). The extensive spread of copper coins by the early Kalacuri could be an indication that copper was widely available in the trade circuits connected to Kalyan and that the early Kalacuris might have controlled some of the copper mines and perhaps tried to play a role in this remunerative long-distance commerce.

In summary, it seems reasonable to suggest that the impetus for the creation of cave 6 and the inauguration of an eastern group of caves at Aurangabad came from social groups that benefited from the involvement of the upper plateau region in international trade linked to the Indian Ocean, much as it had been in previous centuries. The catalyst for this new phase of activity at Aurangabad was the early Kalacuri power that at the beginning of the sixth century attempted to unite the area of Kalyan in Konkan, the Nasik Ghat, and the upland Aurangabad region. The diffusion of the *aṣṭamahābhaya* icon so important to the religious needs of merchants and travelers at Buddhist sites in the upper areas of the plateau corroborates this picture. Such icons were completely absent in north India during the Gupta and post-Gupta periods but were common later on along the Silk Road (De Mallman 1948, 92–93), an area also characterized by a high density of merchants and travelers.

5.2 Emergence and Triumph of the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi at Aurangabad from Cave 2 to Cave 6: Moving Towards *Vajrayāna*?

By the entrance of cave 2, in the western group of caves at Aurangabad, a *bodhisattva* holding a *vajra* is prominently depicted on the left wall in a large sculptural composition that follows the blueprint of votive panels (fig. 22). He stands on a lotus to the left of a Buddha in

dhyānāsana; he wears a tall crown, two necklaces, and a snake armlet and holds the *vajra* in his left hand, resting on a scarf tied across his hips. Vajrapāṇi is the only intact figure in this tableau that could be one of the last sculptural additions to the cave. It is possible that such an unusually large composition carved deep in the rock surface was not part of the initial iconographic program. The close affinities in iconography and composition between this large tableau by the entrance to the porch of cave 2 and the votive panels carved in the unfinished porch of cave 1 (fig. 12) suggest that as cave 2 was filling up with panels, donors looking for suitable surfaces may have began to look for uncarved areas in the porches of the caves. At this time cave 5 must not have existed (fig. 47); if it had, devotees would have filled it with votive images before carving panels in the porch of the barely roughed-out cave 1, which did not even have a Buddha shrine. The *vajra*-bearing *bodhisattva* also appears in some of the votive panels carved in the interior *pradakṣiṇāpatha* of cave 2 (fig. 26). There he is always paired with the ascetic *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara and is fully interchangeable with a *bodhisattva* having a *stūpa* in his crown and a scarf tied on his left thigh.

It is only in the eastern group of caves that the *vajra* bearer is a dominant figure and is represented on a colossal scale as a *dvārapāla* paired with Avalokiteśvara by the entrance of cave 6 (fig. 60). Vajrapāṇi is flanked there by a small attendant and holds his luminous weapon, the *vajra*, with his left hand, which rests on a scarf tied across one hip. His right arm is bent forward—perhaps he held a lotus, like his *paredros* Avalokiteśvara. Both the *bodhisattva*s guarding the entrance to cave 6 wear princely headdresses: Avalokiteśvara has an effigy of Amitābha in his crown and Vajrapāṇi has a *stūpa* in his.[14]

Vajrapāṇi is a remarkable presence in Buddhist literature and art. His identity evolves from that of a *yakṣa* to that of a fully fledged *bodhisattva,* who compiles and makes accessible the *Mahāyāna sūtras*, to become eventually an emblem of esoteric knowledge and the revealer of Buddhist *Tantras* (DeCaroli 2002, 182). Vajrapāṇi as a *yakṣa* has a special connection with mountains and caves. He is also the head of the *Guhyakās*

[14] As discussed earlier, the *stūpa* in the crown is generally considered an attribute of the *bodhisattva* Maitreya. However, there is no clear evidence that such iconography was canonized in the western Deccan during the sixth century. The *stūpa* in the crown at Aurangabad seems to have had a broad use in the context of *boddhisattva* iconography.

or 'secret *yakṣas*', which Lamotte (1966) describes as being 'genies des cavernes', who eventually played a role as mysterious creatures in the Buddhist and brahmanical literature of India.[15] Lamotte gathered several textual passages in which Vajrapāṇi uses his magic *vajra* to shake the mountains. Most notable is the story of the confrontation between the Buddha and Devadātta, related in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya,* in which Vajrapāṇi's *vajra* has the power to break the rock (Lamotte 1966, 127). In the *Sarvāstivāda vinaya vibhāṣā*, Vajarapani also uses his magic weapon to protect the *pradakṣiṇā*: 'Selon la loi du Buddha, le tour se fait par la droite. Si quelu'un tourne par la gauche, le Guhyakā Malla (Vajrapāṇi) le frappe avec son *vajrakūṭa*' (Lamotte 1966, 118). The placement of a colossal Vajrapāṇi image in cave 6 at Aurangabad to the proper left of the entrance to the unit, right where the corridor for circumambulation ends, seems in line with this Buddhist source.

Images of Vajrapāṇi abound in Gandharan art of the Kuṣāṇa period. He is often depicted in stories from the life of the Buddha not as a *bodhisattva* but rather as Śākyamuni's faithful protector.[16] Vajrapāṇi's association with mountains and caves is evident also in Gandharan sculpture; he is often represented, for example, in the *Indraśalaguhā* scenes and always appears at the conversion of the *nāga* Apalāla, which supposedly took place outdoors, among mountains (fig. 143). In the Gandharan tradition, Vajrapāṇi wears a distinctive Western, classical costume and never appears alone as an independent deity. The Gandharan Buddhist reliefs tend to include Vajrapāṇi especially in conversion scenes in which the Buddha is challenged by ennemies of the *dharma* and eventually defeats them. For example, Vajrapāṇi always appears when Śākyamuni defeats Mara prior to enlightenment, or when Śākyamuni competes with the heretics.[17] Vajrapāṇi's *vajra* seems to be the magic weapon that the Buddha uses when performing miracles to establish the undisputable superiority of his doctrine. In

[15] In a later popular *Māhayāna* tradition Vajrapāṇi recites the *Mahāyāna sūtras* to a large number of *bodhisattvas* gathered in the Vimalasvabhāva cave (Davidson 2002, 147).

[16] Scholars have offered different explanations for the presence of Vajrapāṇi in Gandharan art. See Senart (1905), Santoro (1979), and Filigenzi (2006).

[17] For Vajrapāṇi in Gandharan scenes depicting Mara's attack see Zwalf (1996, II, 114, n. 185; 115, n. 188). Vajrapāṇi occupies a prominent position in several conversion scenes which include the episode of the *nāga* Apalāla (Ibid., II, 130, n. 214; 131, n. 215; 132, n. 216), the barking dog (Ibid., II, 138, n. 226, 227); the nursing of the dead woman (Ibid., II, 225); and the invitation of Śrigupta (Ibid., II, 146, n. 241).

this sense the presence at Aurangabad of Vajrapāṇi flanking the Buddha with Avalokiteśvara in votive panels or as a *dvārapāla* appears to be the logical development of the earlier Gandharan persona of Vajrapāṇi as the paladin of the Buddha and his doctrine. It is possible that the relative popularity of Vajrapāṇi in the western Deccan may have resulted from the extensive exchange between the Gandharan region and the area of the Ajanta range in the fifth century.[18] Vajrapāṇi, a *yakṣa* historically allied with the Buddha and his doctrine, in times of need is enrolled among the *bodhisattvas* to continue his role as protector of the *dharma*. Vajrapāṇi's role and responsibilities in the western Deccan were adjusted to the changed circumstances as Buddhism was increasingly challenged by a new phenomenon: the growing power of Śaivism. Vajrapāṇi, the powerful leader of the fierce *yakṣas,* was perhaps the most 'Śaiva' figure in the traditional Buddhist pantheon and thus the best equipped to tackle the new contenders; this may account for the increasing presence and relevance of this *bodhisattva* in the western Deccan from the fifth century onwards.[19]

A source known in the western Deccan, the twenty-fourth chapter of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra,* dedicated to Avalokiteśvara, describes Vajrapāṇi as one of the possible forms that the compassionate *bodhisattva* may take to preach the *dharma* (Kern 1884, XXIV, 411):

> How O Lord, is it that the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara frequents this Saha world? And how does he preach the law? And which is the range of the skillfulness of the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara? [...] In some worlds, young man of good family, the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara preaches the law to creatures in the shape of a Buddha; in others he does so in the shape of a Bodhisattva .... to those who are to be converted by Iśvara he preaches the law in the shape of Iśvara; to those who are to be converted by Maheśvara, he preaches assuming the shape of Maheśvara. To those who are to be converted by a Cakravartin, he shows the law after assuming the shape of a Cakravartin;...to those who are to be converted by Kubera, he shows the law by appearing in the shape of Kubera; to those who are to be converted by a Senāpati, he preaches in the shape of Senāpati; to those who are to be converted by assuming Brahman, he preaches in the shape of a

[18] Vajrapāṇi's popularity in Gandharan art is mirrored by his presence in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*. See Lamotte (1966). This text was one of the pillars of Gandharan Buddhism.

[19] Davidson explains the important role played by Vajrapāṇi in the Tantric ritual of *abhiṣeka* in light of Vajrapāṇi's martial characteristics, which fit the 'feudal' dynamics in the formation of esoteric Buddhism (Davidson 2002, 127).

> Brahman; to those who are to be converted by Vajrapāṇi, he preaches in the shape of Vajrapāṇi. With such inconceivable qualities, young men of good family, is the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara endowed.'

This passage may be helpful in explaining why Vajrapāṇi appears so frequently in the caves as a *paredros* of Avalokiteśvara.

The growing popularity of Vajrapāṇi in the caves of the western Deccan during the sixth century may be directly linked to the growing challenges that Buddhism faced in the area from the Śaiva tradition, strongly supported by the early Kalacuris and the feudal elite at the time. In order to survive, Buddhism had to come to grips with other religious traditions and use all weapons available, including Vajrapāṇi's *vajra* to protect the *dharma* and to defeat those who opposed it. Eventually this aspect became dominant in the role played by Vajrapāṇi in *Vajrayāna* and Tantric Buddhism. In the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* Vajrapāṇi is still presented as the lord of *yakṣas* and chief of *guhyakās*, as this position may better enable him to tame these potentially harmful deities and channel their power in favor of the practitioner (Macdonald 1962, 97). A well-known passage of the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha* epitomizes the belligerent role that Vajrapāṇi took over as the protagonist of a fierce battle with the god Maheśvara, one of the paramount challengers of the *dharma,* who was eventually subjugated and converted by Vajrapāṇi (Davidson 2002, 150–51).

Vajrapāṇi's iconography became more developed also in a non-Buddhist direction to respond to new challenges. For example, in the large votive panels outside cave 2 he wears an armlet in the shape of a coiled snake, the snake being one of the characteristic attributes of the god Śiva (fig. 22);[20] in cave 6, where he occupies a top position by the entrance to the shrine, paired with Avalokiteśvara, he is represented with an attendant, an *āyudhapuruṣa*, that visually echoes the shape of his *vajra* (fig. 60); *āyudhapuruṣas* are generally associated with Hindu deities.

Vajrapāṇi at Aurangabad 6 is flanked by a small attending figure with arms crossed over his chest that makes a visual reference to the magic weapon held by the *bodhisattva*. This iconography, although rather uncommon, is occasionally found in the post-Gupta sculptural

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[20] In the panel representing the descent of the Ganges at Elephanta, Śiva's snake emerges from behind his left arm right where his coiled armlet is; the sculptor of the *vajra* bearer in Aurangabad cave 2 seems to have conflated these two elements appearing in the Elephanta images into a snake-shaped *keyura* worn by the *bodhisattva*.

tradition of Nepal; from the Licchavi period there are a few images of Vajrapāṇi flanked by an attendant wearing a headdress shaped like the prong of a thunderbolt and with his arms crossed on his chest. A stone sculpture found in situ at the Dwaka Bahal *caitya* in Nepal (Huntington and Bangdel 2003, 198, fig. 4) is a good example of this iconographic type (fig. 144).[21] On the basis of a ninth century Nepalese text, the *Sarvatathāgatavajrasamaya*, Huntington and Bangdel identify the small figure as *Vajra Anuchara* who, emanating from Vajrapāṇi's feet during his fight against Maheśvara, embodies the power of conversion of this Buddhist *bodhisattva* or *yakṣa* over the enemies of the *dharma.* Huntington also identifies Vajrapāṇi's attendant in Aurangabad 6 as *Vajra Anuchara* and dismisses any conceptual and visual affinities between this personage and a Hindu *āyudhapuruṣa* (Huntington and Bangdel 2003, 198–203). The gesture displayed by this small attendant, consisting in the arms crossed over the chest, is labeled by Huntington as the *vinaya hasta,* while Getty (1988) identifies it as the *vajra-hūṃkara mudrā* based on the *mantra* allegedly pronounced by Vajrapāṇi to neutralize Maheśvara, a Buddhist antidote to the *Om Namaḥ Śivāya*.[22] Linrothe (1999) identifies Vajrapāṇi's attendant in Aurangabad cave 6 as Vajrapuruṣa, thus implying that the figure with crossed arms is a personification of Vajrapāṇi's weapon, comparable to the *āyudhapuruṣa* of a Hindu deity.[23]

The sixth century in the western Deccan was a time of great exchange and competition between the Buddhist and the Hindu traditions, and it is likely that Vajrapāṇi's small associate was developed in response to the Hindu notion of *āyudhapuruṣa*. Such subsidiary

[21] See also a small bronze sculpture published in Pal (1985, 90). A crossed-arm attendant is represented in a sculpture now in the National Museum of New Delhi representing a standing *bodhisttva,* likely a *dvārapāla*, with the typical scarf tied across his hip, holding what looks like a flower in his left hand and resting his right elbow on a small figure with arms crossed and a *vajra* point in his headdress (Linrothe 1999, 36, fig. 14). The *bodhisattva* wears a dhoti tied in a way that is characteristic of many sculptures from Shamalaji in Gujarat dating to the post-Gupta period.

[22] Later versions of this crossed-arm gesture are characteristic of the Tantric figure of *Vajradhāra*, an Adi Buddha of the Śākyamuni's family, who bears the *vajra* and is credited with the revelation of *Tantra* (Getty 1988, 4; Wayman 1996, 12).

[23] Linrothe considers this small figure as one of the first representations of *krodha-vighnāntaka* in Buddhist art. On the emergence and diffusion of Vajrapuruṣa, see Linrothe (1999, 33–41) and Giuliano (2001, 247–298). In the eighth century sculptures from Ratnagiri and Udayagiri in Orissa it is generally Hayagriva who displays this gesture when he appears as a subsidiary deity to Avalokiteśvara (Linrothe 1999, figs. 68, 69, 70, 90, 91, 92).

deities were mentioned in several Sanskrit religious texts, especially in association with the god Viṣṇu. The *Viṣṇudharmottāra Purāṇa* explicitly says that a weapon like the *vajra* can be shown in human form.[24] *Āyudhapuruṣas* as personified weapons also appear in Sanskrit dramatic literature; most notably, they had a major role in Bhāsa's play *Dūtavākya* as attendants of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa and were brought onto the stage with great theatrical effects (Varadpande 1996, 48–49). However, it was only in the Gupta period that *āyudhapuruṣas* began to be represented in the context of Vaiṣṇava images; most well known is the *Anantaśayana* relief from Deogarh (fig. 145). Beneath the god Viṣṇu in that relief appear five small princely figures and a female, alluding to the god's weapons and embodying his power as he rests on the cosmic snake.[25] Especially relevant is the second *āyudhapuruṣa* from the left, represented with crossed arms, just like Vajrapāṇi's attendant in cave 6 at Aurangabad. He is *cakrapuruṣa*, since part of a *cakra* emerges from his headdress (Van Kooij 1983, 681). It is possible that the crossed-arms gesture in Viṣṇu's personified *cakra* alludes to the luminous quality of the shining weapon of the god, the *cakra* used to subdue the enemies. Viṣṇu is a god intrinsically associated with light: in the Vedic literature he is often linked to fire, lightning, and solar light, hence the crossed arms of *cakrapuruṣa,* the most luminous and dangerous of his anthropomorphic weapons.[26] In Aurangabad cave 6 also, the crossed arms of Vajrapāṇi's assistant may be a symbolic reference to the light power emanating from the *vajra* held by the *bodhisattva*. Vajrapāṇi's *vajra*, much like Viṣṇu's *cakra*, is a luminous weapon used to defeat the enemy and protect the established order or *dharma*—hence the similar luminous-*vajra* gesture of their small attendants.[27]

[24] The painted image of Vajrapāṇi on the rear wall antechamber of Ajanta cave 1 also is accompanied by a personified attribute.

[25] On these subsidiary figures in the Deogarh panel see Van Kooij (1983). On Viṣṇu's *āyudhapuruṣa* in general see Rao (1985, I, part 1, 288–92).

[26] On the light elements in Viṣṇu's iconography see Rao (1985, I, part 1, 73–75). The *cakra* is the only weapon of the god Viṣṇu that develops an independent role, as *Sudarśana cakra*, a Vaiṣṇava deity found in all important Hindu temples. In the *Śilparatna*, *Sudarśana cakra* is addressed as a manifestation of Viṣṇu's terrible side which emerges when he defeats demonic enemies. This subsidiary deity is associated with fire, sun, and brilliant light and, according to the *Pāñcarātrāgama*, also holds a *vajra* (Ibid., 291–92).

[27] The martial character of Vajrapāṇi and his *vajra* being a powerful weapon are discussed in Davidson (2002, 127). In the eighth century *Vajraśekharatantra* Vajrapāṇi is described as 'the best of those subduing the difficult to tame,' while in the

In summary, Vajrapāṇi effigies at Aurangabad anticipate the role that this *bodhisattva*, defender of the *dharma* and converter of those who challenge it, plays in the esoteric tradition.[28] Vajrapāṇi acquires here characteristics of his rivals in order to compete with them, following a strategy that Buddhism adopted on all fronts to survive new challenges, a strategy that eventually led to the blossoming of Buddhist *Tantra*. In fact much of the Buddhist imagery of caves 6 and 7 at Aurangabad indicates that by the middle of the sixth century, Buddhism in the western Deccan had become distanced from the religiosity of the Vākāṭaka period and had headed in a new direction, one that was a prelude to full affirmation of the esoteric tradition.

5.3 Cave 7 Maṇḍapa: Magic and Protective Deities

The iconographic layout of the *maṇḍapa* of cave 7 illustrates how the sixth century Buddhists responded to changed environments and new challenges. Popular deities were now fully framed within Buddhist visual modes and new figures emerged as a reflection of the ongoing confrontation with different forms of religiosity established in the early medieval period. For example, images of Gaja Lakṣmī, which had a place in Buddhist art from early on, in the porch of Aurangabad 7 take on an iconographic form reminiscent of votive panels depicting triads (fig. 81). Similarly, in the right chapel of the *maṇḍapa* is a large tutelary couple, Jambhala-Kubera and Hāritī, framed by female attendants holding lotus flowers (fig. 69). All of these images, which have many protective connotations, are in the porch of cave 7, the most 'public' part of this unit (fig. 64). Opposite the tutelary couple, carved on the wall of the left chapel in the porch (fig. 65) is a unique row of images standing on lotus flowers: from the left is Avalokiteśvara, followed by six female deities holding lotuses in their raised right hands and a Buddha in *varādamudrā* (figs. 66, 67, 68). This series of female figures, not seen before in the Buddhist caves of the western Deccan, seems to have been created after the blueprint of the Śaiva *mātṛkās* that are often found in cave temples attributed to the early Kalacuris,

Guhyasamājatantra there is a meditation practice associated with the deity Vajradhāra named the '*vajra* that paralyzes all the non-Buddhist teachers' (Ibid., 197 and 193).

[28] On this issue see Linrothe (1999, 38–40). On Vajrapāṇi's role in esoteric Buddhism see Davidson (2002, 147–51).

as well as in the so-called Brahmanical cave at Aurangabad.[29] Given the unusual number of six and their association with Avalokiteśvara, it is unlikely that these female figures represent the *prajñās,* as some scholars have suggested (Berkson 1984, 120; Gupte 1963, 59–63). Instead, I propose that they depict the *vidyārājñīs* or deities personifying the magic powers of *mantras,* in particular those mentioned together with Avalokiteśvara in the *maṇḍala* described in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*: Pāṇḍaravāsinī, Tārā, Bhṛkuṭī, Prajnāpāramitā, Locanā, Uṣṇīṣarājā. These *vidyārajñīs* are mentioned at the beginning of the second chapter of the text, as the *maṇḍalācārya* begins to draw the outer spheres of the *maṇḍala* after the proper ritual preparations (Macdonald 1962, 107). In the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* the six deities are positioned in the outermost part of the *maṇḍala*, flanking its 'entrance', much as in the layout of cave 7, and they belong to the realm of auspicious figures. Their presence at Aurangabad does not imply that the whole of cave 7 literally reproduces the *maṇḍala* described in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*. Rather, it suggests that the body of imagery found in later caves at Aurangabad may reflect the devotional substratum subsequently developed and articulated in the text. The *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* is a work that bridges *Mahāyāna* visionary theological tradition and esoteric ritual prescriptions, and it is one of the first sources in Buddhist literature to include a conspicuous number of female deities. Although its date and location of compilation are problematic and possibly slightly postdate cave 7, its atmosphere evokes a religious landscape in transformation that reflects the scenario of Aurangabad cave 7.[30]

The *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* also includes a long section dedicated to *vidyā mantras,* which Wallis (2002, 45) explains as being

> …a class of *mantras* called *vidyā*, taught by *Mañjuśrī* in the assembly gathered in the Śuddhāvāsa palace.… The *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* does not offer explicit explanations of the *vidyā* but presents images and descriptions of use. The main image of the *vidyā* is of a 'female companion' (*anucarī*) of Mañjuśrī—all *vidyās* are given in the feminine gender. The *vidyās* are 'possessed of beautiful hair' (*keśinī*, *upakeśinī*), 'star-like'

[29] Effigies of the *Saptamātṛkās* can be seen in the Great Cave at Elephanta, in Dhokeshwara, and in cave 14 at Ellora, which are all Śaiva caves possibly linked to the early Kalacuris.

[30] Wallis (2002, 12–13) remarks that this text is both a *kalpa* or cultic manual and a *Mahāyānavaipulyasūtra;* other *vaipulya sūtras* mentioned in the *Mañjuśīmūlakalpa* are the *Prajñāpāramitā, Daśabhūmika, Suvarṇaprabhāsottama,* and *Gaṇḍavyūha*. See also Lalou (1930).

> (*tārāvatī*), 'possessed of brilliant, glorious beauty' (*śvetaśrīvapu*), 'of great loveliness' (*mahālakṣmī*).

The emphasis in this text on the beauty and the extraordinary hair of these *vidyās* has an exact visual counterpart in the images from Aurangabad cave 7: the female figures in this cave display uniquely elaborate hairdos not seen elsewhere in the western Deccan. The following passage gives us a sense of how the *vidyās* are treated in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (Wallis 2005, 45):

> Homage to all Buddhas, whose teachings are indestructible: *oṃ riṭi svāhā!* This is the *vidyā* that does everything: it is called 'lovely hair,' [and is] the female companion of Mañjuśrī. During all rituals requiring an attendant the great sealing gesture, 'five crests' is used.... Homage to the universal Buddhas who possess inconceivably wondrous forms. *Oṃ nu re* [T.=*tāre*] *svāha*. This *vidyā*, called 'star-like' (*tārāvatī*) is commended for all rituals. Performed together with the 'staff of force,' [this *vidyā*] is a destroyer of obstacles.

Wallis also explains that 'The *vidyās* refer to feminine deities that were appropriated by Buddhists. As such, they are classed as belonging not to the family of *buddhas* (*tathāgatakula*) but to that of the 'lotus' (*abijakula*). The *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* mentions numerous *vidyārajñīs* 'proceeding from the *samādhi* of the manifest Lokeśvara'; the *vidyārajñīs* 'proceed from the *mantras* and penetrate the vow of the lotus family' (Wallis, 2002, 46).

The depiction of six *vidyārajñīs* in the side chapel of cave 7 at Aurangabad offers insight into the genesis of the esoteric tradition in the western Deccan. It fills a gap in our knowledge of the Buddhist religious tradition, knowledge based mostly on textual sources, which rarely capture the dynamics of change or the surfacing of new forms. The porch of cave 7, the most public part of this unit, mediates marvelously between the old and the new, between the Buddhist and the non-Buddhist, between the popular and the esoteric. While *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara solidly anchors this unit to the *Mahāyāna* tradition, female figures are given new prominence and roles that prefigure later traditions; the representation of the set of female deities associated with magic spells in the side chapel of cave 7 foresees the emphasis placed on goddess circles in the esoteric traditions.

Gaja Lakṣmī, a folk deity traditionally linked to abundance and fertility, also appears above side openings in the porch of cave 7 at Aurangabad (fig. 81). Images of this goddess have been found on Bud-

dhist monuments dated to early times; well-known examples are those from the *vedikās* of the *stupas* at Sanchi and Bharhut. In the Ajanta-Aurangabad region an early image of Gajā Lakṣmī being bathed by elephants has also been found at the cave site of Pitalkhora, demonstrating the long-lasting popularity of this deity in the local milieu.[31] This relief from Pitalkhora represents the goddess with her hair in a chignon and holding two long-stemmed lotus flowers. In cave 7 at Aurangabad the effigy of Gaja Lakṣmī is a bit different: she sits in *lalitāsana*, her elephants stand beside her on lotus flowers with interconnected stems, and she is flanked by princely figures that look like *bodhisattvas*. This grouping, in which the central deity is flanked by two princely attendants, is reminiscent of the iconographic format characteristic of Buddhist votive panels in caves 1, 2 and 5 of the western group (fig. 26). The images of the goddess being bathed by elephants in Aurangabad cave 7 are very similar to a panel depicting Gaja Lakṣmī, from cave 14 at Ellora, a Śaiva establishment that has been tentatively linked to the early Kalacuris (fig. 146) (Soundara Rajan 1981, pl. XLVIII.B).

These sixth century images from the Aurangabad region depicting Lakṣmī in *lalitāsana* anticipate effigies of the goddess found at eighth century Buddhist sites in Orissa. At Ratnagiri, a major center for esoteric Buddhism, Gaja Lakṣmī seated in *lalitāsana* often appears above the entrances to monasteries, in a position comparable to that of the image in Aurangabad cave 7 (Donaldson 2001, 372–73). Perhaps the popularity of this deity in Buddhist art during the medieval period is related to her symbolic association with royal consecration and *abhiṣeka* involving ritual sprinkling of water (Kinsley 1987, 22). Buddhist esoteric initiation rituals incorporated, on a metaphoric level, elements of the royal *abhiṣeka*, and it may be that the goddess Lakṣmī was already seen at this time as a protective emblem for the practitioner (Davidson 2002, 127).[32]

The appearance of the tutelary couple of Hāritī and Jambhala-Pāñcika-Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa at Aurangabad 7 may be interpreted in a similar way (fig. 69). The couple was the object of fervent devotion at

[31] This sculptural fragment from Pitalkhora is now in the holdings of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (former Prince of Wales Museum) in Mumbai, acc. no. 14982.

[32] An image of Gaja Lakṣmī in the porch of Ellora cave 14 represents the goddess in *lalitāsana* flanked by two multi-armed princely attendants.

the beginning of the Common Era in Gandhara, represented in a few Buddhist schist sculptures. At Ajanta, Hāritī and her consort occupy a prominent position in the fifth century cave 2, where they are represented, flanked by two female *caurī* bearers, in the side chapel of the main shrine with the Buddha image (fig. 147). The story of Hāritī, her children, and her transformation from a dangerous witch into a protective Buddhist deity is related in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*, a well-known source both in Gandhara and in the western Deccan.[33] The prominence of Hāritī at Ajanta has been explained by Cohen (1998) as an exact reflection of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* tradition; he also maintains that Hāritī had an important function as a local intermediary between the monastic establishment and the laity, in addition to being a protective deity of the Vatsagulma Vākāṭaka lineage.

Hāritī and her consort, the lord of riches, found an important place in the *Mahāyāna* tradition also: in the twenty-first chapter of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* the Buddha is asked about the merit attainable through the teachings of this *sūtra*. He answers that the merit for those who have memorized the text are great, as they are given powerful *dhāraṇīs* by deities such as Vaiśravaṇa and the *rakṣasī* Hāritī, who, along with her retinue of children and other *rakṣasī*, intervenes personally in the *sūtra* to deliver protective *mantras* to devotees (Kern 1884, XXI, 374). In his seventh century account, the Chinese pilgrim Yi Jing (Takakusu 1896, 37) confirms the wide diffusion of Hāritī images in Indian monasteries; he says that they were placed in the porch or in a corner of the dining hall, and abundant food was offered before them every day.

In the later *Vajrayāna* tradition this couple continued to have widespread popularity owing to their demonic nature and mastery over magic and protective formulas. In the western Deccan effigies of Hāritī and her consort appear in the Buddhist caves at Ellora (Malandra 1993, 103–107). Hāritī's partner Jambhala-Pāñcika-Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa acquired a key role as king of *vidyādharas,* divine sorcerers, who in the esoteric tradition ended up being conflated with *siddhas* or advanced tantric practitioners (Lalou 1946; Davidson 2002, 235). Images of the fortune god are common at eighth century Buddhist sites in Orissa. He is generally seated in *lalitāsana,* holding a mongoose-purse in his left hand and a citron in his right, the latter attribute reminiscent of

[33] On Hāritī, see Peri (1917). See also M. Shaw (2006, 110–42).

the Lakuliśa iconography in Pāśupata imagery (Donaldson 2001, I, 329–32).[34]

In Aurangabad cave 7 Jambhala-Kubera holds in his left hand a skinny bag of coins, which could be a prototype for the mongoose-purse that this deity holds in sculptures from Ratnagiri in Orissa; however, it is impossible to tell if he originally held something in his right hand (fig. 69). The position of this god in the left chapel of the porch by the entrance of cave 7 reminds us of the placement of effigies of Jambhala-Kubera flanking the entrance to monastery 1 at Ratnagiri (Donaldson 2001, 330). However, the combination of Hāritī with the fortune god in Aurangabad indicates that the notion of tutelary couple seen at Ajanta was deliberately perpetuated at Aurangabad. The juxtaposition of Hāritī and Kubera to the *vidyārajñīs* on the other side of the hall of cave 7 may be an indication that the fortune couple by this time was worshiped mostly as a giver of *dhāraṇīs*. Hāritī shows the same attributes of the female personifications of magic formulae represented elsewhere in the cave, and the larger size of her partner Kubera indicates that by this time he was the more prominent figure of the couple and had possibly already begun to assume the role of king of *vidyādhara* that characterizes his persona in the esoteric tradition.

The *maṇḍapa* of Aurangabad cave 7, much like the rest of the cave, has many female figures. To the right as you look at the cave entrance is a female deity with a small attendant sculpted near a large *bodhisattva dvārapāla* (fig. 70). It is hard to say whether this female deity was intended to be part of the *bodhisattva*'s entourage, since identification of the *bodhisattva* himself is problematic (fig. 80). Scholars have recognized him alternatively as being Vajrapāṇi or Khasarpaṇa Lokeśvara, but given the lack of clearly recognizable attributes in this figure it is hard to say which of these two identifications is correct. The small female image next to him has always been recognized as being Tārā.

The iconography and pose of the *dvārapāla bodhisattva* represented in pair with *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara in Aurangabad cave 7 is surprisingly reminiscent of the painted *bodhisattva* paired with Padmapāṇi by the entrance to the shrine of Ajanta cave 1. The Ajanta cave 1 painted figure shares with the *bodhisattva* in cave 7 the posture, the gestures, and both have an emblem in the crown that is hard to identify. Both *bodhisattva*s are flanked to their proper left by

[34] Images of Hāritī are notably scarce at eighth century Buddhist sites in Orissa.

an *āyudhapuruṣa,* which in Aurangabad cave 7 wears a crown reminiscent of the prongs of a *vajra*, hence the identification of Vajrapāṇi proposed for the figure. The presence of the attending female deity and the crest misidentified as depicting a seated Buddha have prompted D. C. Bhattacarya to recognize the *dvārapāla bodhisattva* in cave 7 at Aurangabad as being Khasarpaṇa Lokeśvara flanked by Tārā and Sudhānakumāra (Berkson 1986, 125). This iconographic group is described in the *Sādhanamālā*, a later tantric source dedicated to magic rituals which is filled with iconographic descriptions of visualization and thus is very helpful in interpreting artistic remains. However, it is often forgotten that this collection of texts was compiled sometime in the eleventh century and that it reflects a cultural horizon between the seventh and eleventh centuries (Winternitz 1999, II, 378).

When we try to interpret the iconography of cave 7 and, more generally, that of the eastern caves at Aurangabad, the major problem is that we tend to use textual sources composed elsewhere, at a later date, which discuss the imagery as a *fait accompli* and do not capture the subtleties of a tradition in the making. The Buddhist *Sādhanamālā*, for example, reflects a canonized, developed ritual which includes visual forms consolidated well after the Aurangabad caves were excavated. This text, although helpful for recognizing the salient features of the main deities represented at Aurangabad and their reciprocal associations, cannot explain point by point the images in the eastern group of caves. There we see mostly a *Mahāyāna* Buddhist negotiation of Hindu, especially Śaiva, religiosity that later on gave way to a fully tantric path. The unique iconographies of cave 7 at Aurangabad have few counterparts in the written sources. Texts like the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* or the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* that tell of the late *Mahāyāna* and early esoteric traditions, may be more helpful than the *Sādhanas* in reconstructing the kind of religious atmosphere in which the eastern caves at Aurangabad developed.[35] Yet, these sources are not entirely satisfactorily, because the Aurangabad caves capture the time of transformation in Buddhist practice in the western Deccan throughout the sixth century, and they are in themselves the best record we have of this important and delicate phase of transition.

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[35] The *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* is self-defined as a *mahāvaipulya Mahāyāna sūtra* of the *Avataṃsaka*, yet the atmosphere of the text is in line with the tantric tradition (Winternitz 1999, II, 382).

5.4 Female Deities in Cave 7

The dominance of female deities in the eastern group of caves is a feature that sets apart this later cluster of excavations at Aurangabad. Cave 7 is crowded with female images. As we have seen, in the porch there are two small Gajā Lakṣmī panels (fig. 81), and in the side chapels are a large sculpture of Hāritī with her consort (fig. 69) and six goddesses who might represent the six *vidyārajñīs,* flanked by Avalokiteśvara and a *varāda* Buddha (figs. 66, 67, 68). These images, which are in the most accessible and public part of the cave, seem to be imbued with protection and auspiciousness, placed there to protect the path of those who practice. Inside the cave, in the vestibule to the shrine flanking the entrance to the sanctum, are two large sculptural tableaux with female deities and female attendants (figs. 82, 85, 86). On the side walls of the sanctum, the innermost part of the cave, a dancing female goddess with female musicians is represented on the proper right of the Buddha image (fig. 88) and a female deity with Avalokiteśvara is on the Buddha's left (fig. 89). All these images appear to be part of the original iconographic design of cave 7: no other Buddhist caves in the western Deccan display a similar dominance of female deities.

Why are there so many female deities in Aurangabad cave 7? One would be tempted to link this unusual circumstance to a substantial participation of female devotees in the patronage of this cave. Yet Buddhist scholars have demonstrated that both in *Mahāyāna* and esoteric Buddhism, the role played by female members of the Buddhist community, whether ordained or not, was marginal. Most of the textual sources that can be ascribed to these two major Buddhist movements address exclusively male practitioners. Women in *Mahāyana* literature are charged with negative connotations, and even when religious concepts in the *sūtras* are deliberately expressed through gender-based metaphors, such as in the case of the female *Prajñāpāramitā*, they reflect very much the perspective of a male-dominated community (Cabezon 1992). Harrison (1987, 76–77) remarks that women in *Mahāyāna* were second-class Buddhists and could not become *bodhisattva*s. Nattier (2003, 87) notes that not a single female name appears in the long list of *bodhisattva*s that marks the opening of every *Mahāyāna* sutra, and the *Mahāyāna* terminology, unlike the earliest tradition, does not include the female gender. In line with these observations, Schopen (1996, 252) has pointed out, on the basis of epigraphic evidence, that the blossoming of *Mahāyāna* corresponds to a noticeable drop in

female patronage. He notes that the 'disappearance of nun donors is suggested as well at other sites, perhaps most dramatically at Ajanta and Sarnath. At Ajanta there were thirty-three monastic donors of images, all of the fifth century, and every one was a monk. Of these thirty-three monks, at least twenty-five referred to themselves specifically as *śākyabhikṣus*'. In the esoteric Buddhist tradition, still developing when the eastern caves at Aurangabad were excavated during the sixth century, the situation was not much different.

Davidson (2002, 93) remarks that in medieval times there was also a strong decline of female participation in religious activity and that Buddhist nuns disappeared almost completely from the north Indian scene beginning in the seventh century. In disagreement with arguments maintaining that records were kept by men and thus did not include indications of the participation of women in society, Davidson concludes that 'medieval Indian women did not participate in Buddhism and most particularly in esoteric Buddhism'.[36] In light of what these eminent scholars of Buddhism have said about the decreased participation of women in the religious arena of the medieval period, the relevance of female imagery in the eastern caves at Aurangabad deserves special attention. It may indicate not a growth of female patronage and devotion, but rather a shift towards a form of Buddhism in which female deities were seen as emblems of established practices such as *mantras* and *dharaṇīs*.

The growing presence of female goddesses in Buddhist art at this time is paralleled by the increasing dominance of magic formulas in Buddhist ritual. The repetition of magic formulas was already important in *Mahāyāna*: in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* a whole chapter is dedicated to the powers of spells. In the twenty-first chapter of this text the Buddha explains the benefits of talismanic words and recommends the use of different spells or *dharaṇīs*. Such magic formulas, however, are not delivered to the devotees by the Buddha himself but by a host of subsidiary deities consisting in *yakṣas* like Vaiśravaṇa, *yakṣīs* with children like Hāritī, and in two cases by *bodhisattva*s whose names, Bhaiśajarāja and Pradānāsūra, reverberate with magic. In the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* many of the words forming incomprehensible

[36] However Davidson (2002, 96) points out, on the basis of textual evidence, that there was consistent female participation in Buddhist communities in Tibet between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A feminist approach to the history of Buddhism is found in Gross (1993) and M. Shaw (1994).

spells are female (Kern 1884, XXI, 370–75). In later *Mahāyāna sūtras* magic formulas are identified as *vidyā* or knowledge and are treated unequivocally as female.[37] Studholme (2002, 61–62), remarks that in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* the six-syllable formula *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* is referred to as *Ṣaḍakṣarī mahāvidyā,* a female designation; in a later recension of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* a similar process can be traced for the *Prajñāpāramitā* that became a *vidyā.* The power of these formulas is said to greatly surpass the benefits to be achieved from worshipping *stūpas*: 'In the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* Śākyamuni tells Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin that the fruit of making *stūpas*, made of gold and jewels, for as many *tathāgatas* as there are dust particles and 'depositing relics each day,' is equivalent only to the fruit of a single syllable of the great six syllable formula' (Studholme 2002, 87). The disengagement from *stūpa* worship of this kind of Buddhism may explain why the patrons of the eastern caves at Aurangabad may not have seen the necessity of establishing an additional *caitya* hall in the eastern group.

It appears that the repetition of magic formulas in association with circumambulation would have achieved especially potent effects.[38] Perhaps a correlation can be seen between the shift to a new cave plan at Aurangabad, which includes a corridor for circumambulation of the sanctum, and the growing role played by *dharaṇīs* or *mantras* in ritual practices at the site. The strong presence in the area of the Pāśupatas sect, which attained the favors of the ruling elite and competed with the Buddhists for local patronage, may have contributed to the fast growth and visibility of such forms of religiosity at Aurangabad. Circumambulation and *mantras* were key parts of the Pāśupata practices, although much of the recitation was done in silence by these Śiva followers (Oberhammer 1991).

The female figures ubiquitous in the eastern group of caves at Aurangabad show that by this time the mastery over magic formulas, female in gender, occupied a key place in Buddhist knowledge and

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[37] In Indic culture the association of female deities with the magic power of the ritual word emerged early on, as the Vedic goddess Vāc assumes the role of the deity of sacred speech (Gonda 1989, 139).

[38] The power of circumambulation is discussed in Sudhi (1985). A description of the prodigious effects achieved by magic formulas recited while performing a ritual circumambulation can also be found in the *Cūlavaṃsa*. During the reign of Upatissa I in the fourth century, monks apparently walked around the city wall of the capital three times, reciting a *parittā,* putting an end to famine and diseases (Gunawardana 1979, 226).

practice. Deities or *vidyās* embodied the non-rational power of spells and the exercise of magic wisdom that was traditionally associated with the women's world. The cult of such deities surfaced powerfully in the religious landscape of the western Deccan in the last part of the sixth century before being fully articulated in tantric rituals preserved in later literature and art from the north India and Himalayan regions. Thus, while later tantric sources may be helpful in identifying the female deities carved at Aurangabad cave 7, much of what we see in the eastern caves cannot be understood exclusively through the tantric lens.

The female deities represented in the antechamber to the shrine of cave 7 are clustered in two groups, each composed of a main goddess standing on a lotus with two subsidiary deities flanked by small attendants (figs. 85, 86). Both of the iconographic groups are set within elaborate architectural frameworks (fig. 82): on the two beams alluding to the roof of the structure there are small *candraśālās* or horseshoe-shaped *oculi* in which Buddhas in *padmāsana* and displaying various *mudrās* are represented. The structure enshrining the female figures includes a roof with several layers, called *phāṃsanā* in Hindu architecture. Meister (1976) notes that this kind of superstructure, which had been depicted in temple motifs on the ceiling beams of cave 3 at Aurangabad, was especially popular in Gujarat and southern Rajasthan from the end of the sixth century into the eighth century. Meister cites the temple at Gop in the Jamngar district, dated to 600 CE, as the earliest standing example of a *phāṃsanā* temple, and he notes that this superstructure is most commonly associated with *maṇḍapas* and the subsidiary shrines generally referred to as *kuṭas* (Meister 1976, 169).[39] The depiction of a *phāṃsanā* structure in Aurangabad may have been intended as a reference to actual small shrines that might have existed at that time to host images of female deities and other subsidiary deities, in proximity to the central sanctum. Given the close connections noted between Aurangabad, southern Rajasthan, and southeastern Gujarat, it is very possible that this architectural form may have come to Aurangabad from that region.

All of the female figures standing beneath the architectural superstructure stand out for their beauty, elegance, and elaborate details. Their headdresses are extremely ornate, their bodies are very plastic,

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[39] On the date of the Gop temple see J. Williams (1982, 171–73).

and from an artistic point of view they are among the best examples of Buddhist rock-cut sculpture in the region. Scholars have identified the deities grouped in two iconographic sets as being centered on different forms of the goddess Tārā, the embodiment of Avalokiteśvara's *karuṇā*.

Huntington (1981) has argued that the placement of the deities in this cave should be interpreted as part of a larger *maṇḍala* scheme inspired by the *vajradhātumaṇḍala* preserved in the eighth century Shingon tradition in Japan. He notes, however, that the correspondence between the textual *maṇḍala* and the layout of cave 7 is not total. At the eighth century Buddhist site of Ellora, where 'esoteric' iconographies are sculpted in stone, it is virtually impossible to recognize any precise maṇḍalic scheme that is preserved in later texts. Malandra (1993) does not identify in Ellora a single known *maṇḍala*. The maṇḍalic layouts she recognizes in the eighth century caves are geometric arrangements of esoteric deities that, if compared with the iconographic diagrams recorded in tantric literature, have many anomalies and idiosyncrasies and do not have much in common with the precise visions illustrated in texts or paintings from Japan or the Himalaya region.

The same, I believe, can be said for Aurangabad cave 7. The unique layout of this unit, dominated by a geometric, hierarchical vision of the divine, can be considered 'maṇḍalic'. Yet a total correspondence of this arrangement to any known *maṇḍalas* is unlikely, not only because the known *maṇḍalas* belong to a different geographical and chronological context, but also because secrecy was a key factor in esoteric practices, and thus it is unlikely that such early-stage complex iconographies, imbued with deep conceptual metaphors, would be unveiled so publicly in these rock-carved monuments. All of the early textual *maṇḍalas* seem to refer to elaborate visualizations destined to be represented in *paṭas* that were not for all to see but only for a few advanced practitioners. Only much later in the Himalayan tradition we see evidence of an interest in creating architectural spaces that closely relate to textual *maṇḍalas* (Luczanits 2006). The concept of 'public' esoteric art seems somewhat contradictory, and the presence of *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara in cave 7 indicates that the audience was still composed mainly of ordinary *Mahāyāna* followers.

One might interpret the organization of this cave as including the outer, public area, the porch, for ordinary worshipers, because it is filled with accessible protective deities and *bodhisattvas,* and the

interior space, with its female imagery, for advanced Buddhist practitioners. The female figures in the vestibule to the shrine, in a location generally occupied by *bodhisattva* images, indicate that *vidyā* intended as magic knowledge had become important for protection and spiritual advancement. What we see in Aurangabad cave 7 seems to anticipate in many ways the atmosphere found in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa,* in which the *bodhisattva*s and those who follow that path are still important figures dedicated to traditional *Mahāyāna* values such as 'writing, thoroughly contemplating, teaching, reciting and meditating on the perfection of wisdom', yet they achieve their positions because they know and practice *mantras* (Wallis 2002, 156).

If some of the female deities in the vestibule to the shrine of Aurangabad cave 7 can be identified as depictions of Tārā, we should remember that Tārā between the end of the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh century was not yet conceived as a female *bodhisattva* and was not the focus of an independent cult. Rather, she was worshipped as a *mahāvidyārājñī*, the quintessential knowledge, the queen of the *mantras* and the *dharaṇī* deity. This role of Tārā and the formative stage of her cult are well illustrated in the *Tārāmūlakalpa*, a poorly known seventh century ritual text that is closely related to the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (Lalou 1936). All the female figures represented in cave 7 have lotus flowers in their headdresses; this does not make them identical with Tārā but rather identifies them all as members of the 'lotus family' or *padmakula*. The *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* states that the *vidyārājñīs* 'proceed from the *mantras* and penetrate the vow of the lotus family' (Wallis 2002, 46). The same text also mentions that they 'proceed from the *samādhi* of the manifest Lokeśvara', which explains the relationships between the many female deities and effigies of Avalokiteśvara that dominate the iconography of Aurangabad cave 7. The *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* says that Tārā is 'famous in the world' and includes the first descriptions of the goddess icon, stating that Tārā should be painted in gold with beautiful ornaments, holding a lotus in her left hand, with her right in *varādamudrā* (M. Shaw 2006, 314).

Detailed visualizations of Tārā appear in the later *Sādhanamālā*. If not applied literally, these passages may be helpful in shedding light on the identity of some of the Aurangabad deities that in many ways represent the earliest and most basic prototypes of later elaborate Buddhist iconographies. For example, in the group to the left as one faces the shrine (fig. 82), the main female deity shares the distinctive attributes of Khadiravāṇī Tārā, a deity mentioned in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*

and descibed in the *Sādhanamālā* as having two arms, holding a lotus in her left hand and having her right hand in *varādamudrā*. Two female subsidiary deities are part of her retinue: according to the *Sādhanamālā,* to her right should be Aśokakāntā Mārīcī and to her left Ekajaṭā. Aśokakāntā, as a two-armed assistant, should hold a bough of the Aśoka tree and display the *varādamudrā* in her right hand. Ekajaṭā is described in her own *sādhanas* as having her hair pulled up in a single *jaṭā* in a very distinctive way and as being short, potbellied, and somewhat terrifying; she also holds a *kartrī* when she is represented with two arms and a sword and a lotus when she has four arms.

The figures on either side of the *mahāvidyārājñī* Tārā could be undeveloped, early forms of these goddesses. They have no haloes, and their small size indicates that they are subordinate entities. In the group to the proper left of the sanctum, the main female deity is flanked to the left by a subsidiary goddess and a dwarfish figure that embodies some of the characteristic traits of Ekajaṭā as described in the *Sādhanamālā:* the distinctive hairdo, the potbelly, the somewhat frightful appearance, and the weapon. The small potbellied female attendant with a single chignon might be represented here as the *āyudhapuruṣa* of the larger figure, the embodiment of her attributes, following a well-established artistic convention in Indian art. In this image we are probably confronted with a proto-Ekajaṭā, a powerful *mantra-vidyā* who is as beautiful as the other *vidyās* and whose frightful and commanding features, which characterize her later iconography, are embodied in her small attendant.

More problematic is the identification of the figure standing to the proper right of the main goddess in the same group. In accord with the *Sādhanamālā* conventions, the subsidiary deity to the proper right of Khadiravāṇī Tārā should be Aśokakāntā, a non-terrifying form of Mārīcī that was quite popular in later tantric art. The image in the vestibule of Aurangabad cave 7 cannot be immediately recognized as a proto-Aśokakāntā. Her enigmatic *āyudhapuruṣa* is similar to a small character carved in the pillar brackets by the shrine vestibule of Aurangabad cave 3. In those brackets the dwarfish figure appears by the side of a *śālabhañjikā*, and this convention seems to have lasted well into the post-Gupta period, as the same composition, with the addition of a princely male in the background, is repeated on the portal of the Lakṣmaṇa temple at Sirpur, dated by scholars to between the seventh and eighth centuries CE (Williams 1982, 160–63). The small, deformed attendant also appears in the Ajanta paintings, where it has

been recognized by Zin (1998) as being a *viduṣaka*, a courtier buffoon appearing in Sanskrit plays.[40] However, one of the main visual characteristics of this dwarfish figure is a distinctive curved staff made from the branch of a tree, an attribute that could allude here to the Aśoka bough supposedly held by the goddess. While this visual metaphor may appear questionable, the unusual position of the standing goddess, with her foreward foot bent, may well reflect the *Sādhanamālā* description of Aśokakāntā as *lilāyordhvashthitāṃ,* which Bhattacharya (1987, 209) translates as the 'sportive position'. Comparable to this deity in Aurangabad cave 7 is a female figure with attendant depicted in an earring of a Śiva sculpture from Kalyanpur (Rajasthan) (figs. 148, 149). This unique piece, whose iconography is puzzling, has been dated to the sixth century and thus would be roughly contemporary to Aurangabad cave 7. While the iconography of the Kalyanpur sculpture and his earrings is as enigmatic as the instance from Aurangabad 7, the fact that a similar image type occurs in multiple instances suggests that we may be seeing a visual *topos* relatively common at the time. The diffusion of specific iconographic modes in different contexts across these regions should not surprise us, as post-Gupta sculpture from eastern Gujarat and southern Rajasthan has close stylistic affinities with that of the western Deccan, especially in the early Kalacuri period.

For the female group represented to the proper left of the shrine (fig. 85), the *Sādhanamālā* may be helpful in identifying some of the features of these figures as well. Again, we should remember that while this text cannot be mechanically employed to recognize the figures represented at Aurangabad, some of the indications it provides can be seen, in a very undeveloped and embryonic form, in the imagery of the eastern group of caves. The central deity of this group could well be another form of Tārā canonized in the later tantric sources as Sita Tārā. The *Sādhanamālā* describes Tārā as having four arms, but it also emphasizes some traits that can be seen in this figure at Aurangabad: Sita Tārā is 'decked in many ornaments' and 'carries the Utpala' (Bhattacharya 1987, 231). Getty (1988, 122) notes that Sita Tārā when represented with two arms in Himalayan art always has long, beautiful hair and displays the *vitarka mudrā*, the so called gesture of argumentation, in which the index and the thumb of the hand are joined, a ges-

[40] On the *viduṣaka* and its role in esoteric Buddhism see Davidson (2002, 281–89). The same character appears also on the brackets of Aurangabad cave 1 pillars (fig. 15), and is often found in the Śaiva caves associated with the patronage of the early Kalacuri rulers.

ture that is shown by the deity at Aurangabad. The *Sādhanamālā* also says that Sita Tārā's retinue is composed of two females. To her right should be Mārīcī, who wears a jacket and ornaments and carries an Aśoka flower in her left hand and a fly whisk in her right. To the left of Sita Tārā should be Mahāmāyūrī, described in the text as having two arms and carrying a peacock feather in her left hand and a fly whisk in her right. Scrutinized closely, the attendants to the proper right of the shrine at Aurangabad cave 7 displays some of the basic iconographic features attached to Mārīcī and Mahāmāyūrī as attendants of Sita Tārā. Their places are mirror images of what is described in the later canonical text. The figure to the left of the main icon may be a 'proto-Mārīcī': she holds a fly whisk and an Aśoka flower and wears clothes that are visibly heavy, perhaps hinting at the 'jacket' described in later texts as worn by the deity. The female figure to the right of the main goddess has a fly whisk in her right hand and something that could be a peacock feather in her left, which would make her a proto-Mahāmāyūrī. This *mantra* deity or *vidyārājñī* is said to have been especially effective against snake bites and therefore must have been a powerful antidote to *nāga*s, who were respected and feared creatures populating the Buddhist caves. The *Mahāmāyūrī vidyārājñī*, a Sanskrit text of incantations very well known because of the list of *yakṣas* it includes, demonstrates that this particular *vidyārājñī* and her magic formulas were very popular in Buddhist India well before the sixth century. This text was translated into Chinese four times between the fourth and eighth centuries, in addition to being translated into Tibetan and regularly copied in Nepal (Lévi 1955, 19; Mevissen 1990). The *Mahāmāyūrī vidyārājñī* is especially important, as it shows that the worship of female figures associated with spells was an integral part of the Buddhist phenomenon well before the full affirmation of tantric Buddhism and that we need not refer exclusively to the esoteric path to explain the presence of female imagery in Aurangabad cave 7. Moreover, this text shows that the cult in Buddhism of female goddesses conceived as incarnations of protective magic powers, is the direct outcome of the *yakṣa* cult that played a key role in this religious practice from its very beginning.

In summary, the female figures depicted in the vestibule of Aurangabad cave 7 seem to anticipate in many ways the ritual and iconographic complexity that characterizes Buddhist female goddesses in esoteric Buddhism. At Aurangabad these deities do not appear yet as fully fledged tantric goddesses in their own right. Rather, they represent different *vidyārājñī* grouped around the *mahāvidyārājñī* Tārā

with the function of guarding the Buddha and protecting devotees with the enchantment power of their formulas. Some of the distinctive iconographic features of these female figures match those of esoteric deities associated with forms of Tārā such as Khadiravāṇī and Sita. At Aurangabad, however, the powers of these deities and their physical features, at times frightening, are relegated to the dwarfish assistants while the deities themselves maintain their beauty. Artfully styled hair, many ornaments, and beauty in general describe the *vidyārājñīs*, the magic queens of *mantras* that bear connections with the secret world of *yakṣinīs* and witchcraft that was always present in the background of Buddhism. At Aurangabad cave 7 this world came to the forefront, a prelude to the complex development of esotericism. This is, I believe, *Tantra* in embryo form, and cave 7 at Aurangabad offers us unprecedented documentation of how esoteric Buddhism may have coalesced.

5.5 The Shrine of Cave 7: The Dancing *Vidyā*

The main Buddha image in the cave 7 shrine conforms closely to tradition: the central Buddha is seated in *pralambapādāsana* on an elaborate throne with his hands in *dharmacakramudrā* (fig. 87). However, the patrons of cave 7 at Aurangabad opted to replace the two *bodhisattva*s with fly whisks usually standing by the throne with six small Tathāgata images in *dhyānāsana* displaying different *mudrās*. The mandalic nature of this arrangement is unquestionable, yet trying to fit this scheme into a *maṇḍala* described in textual sources is virtually impossible. Picron (2000, 1223) notes that the layout of these images in the shrine of cave 7 is very similar to that found in a panel from cave 23 at Nasik, although the order in which the small figures are placed is not exactly identical. She suggests that the central Buddha in the Nasik image may be Vairocana, but the identity of the small figures is not well explained. However, that manifestations of Tathāgatas took the place of traditional *bodhisattvas* or *dvārapālas* indicates that Buddhist practices were moving away from established *Mahāyāna* configurations to experimentation with new forms.[41]

[41] This does not mean that the source of these images is not *Mahāyāna*. The six Buddha effigies could also allude to the six aspects of the Buddha-nature embodied in

This change is confirmed by the introduction of two unprecedented iconographic compositions on the side walls of the sanctum in cave 7: to the Buddha's left is a panel depicting a *bodhisattva* with female deity flanked by small attendants (fig. 89), while to his right is a carving representing a dancing goddess flanked by female musicians (fig. 88). These panels, carved in deep rectangular recesses of the side walls of the sanctum, seem to have been part of the original cave design. Stylistically, the images carved in the shrine relate to those of the *bodhisattvas* and *vidyārājñīs* sculpted in the porch and shrine vestibule of the same cave, thus indicating that these panels were not the product of an afterthought. Conversely, the sculptures in the two subsidiary shrines located in the *pradakṣiṇāpatha* behind the sanctum appear very different from the rest of the images in the cave, suggesting that these two units may have originally been cells, converted into shrines possibly at a different time (figs. 83, 84). This would challenge the validity of any identification suggesting that the cave was originally designed to represent a specific *maṇḍala*, since many elements may not have been included in the initial plan but added at different times to the original design of the unit.

The panel carved to the Buddha's left in the shrine depicts a crowned *bodhisattva* with a female deity (fig. 89). The princely figure stands on a lotus flower, his right hand bent forward and holding something while his left rests on the head of a dwarfish attendant. To his left is a female figure similar in appearance to the deities represented in the vestibule, holding in her right hand a lotus flower at shoulder height. Her left arm and hand are missing, but it is likely that, like her companion, she touched a small attendant, whose head is now missing. This iconographic group has been variously interpreted as depicting Tārā with Avalokiteśvara and Sudhānakumāra and as representing a *prajñā*, symbol of esoteric knowledge, flanked by 'some hypostasis of Vajrapāṇi-Mañjuśrī' (Berkson 1986, 149; Huntington 1981). Linrothe (1999, 34–37) suggests that the male deity is Avalokiteśvara with the very first example of *krodha-vighnāntaka*, or frightful deity, in Indian Buddhism. It is difficult to identify with certainty the iconographic and symbolic meaning of this couple. The male *bodhisattva* holds in his raised right hand a rosary, an attribute generally carried by

the realm of Tathāgatha as discussed in the *Mahāyāna Māhaparinirvāṇa sūtra* (Ming-Wood Liu 2000, 193).

Avalokiteśvara. He stands on a round lotus base, recalling the characteristic moon disk and open lotus flower on which stands Khasarpaṇa Avalokiteśvara, a form of this *bodhisattva* described in later tantric sources (Foucher 1905, 25–26). If indeed this male figure in the shrine of Aurangabad cave 7 can be recognized as an early prototype of Khasarpaṇa Avalokiteśvara, then the dwarfish figure next to him could well be Sūcīmukha, who is described as Avalokiteśvara's attendant collecting a drop of the ambrosia dripping from the *bodhisattva*'s hand (Bhattacharya 1987, 128–29). In the literature, Khasarpaṇa Avalokiteśvara is especially associated with light: in this particular relief, the radiating ribbon worn behind the crown typically seen in early Kalacuri sculpture might also function as a reference to the luminous aspect of the deity. In tantric literature, the female counterpart of Khasarpaṇa Avalokiteśvara is Green Tārā, who holds a bunch of lotus flowers. The *Sādhanamālā* describes her as a young woman with full breasts, laden with jewels, a description that applies well to the female partner of Avalokiteśvara in the shrine of this cave, who is stylistically related to the female deities in the shrine vestibule (Bhattacharya 1987, 129).

Some of the deities represented in sets in the interior of cave 7 at Aurangabad can be interpreted as early prototypes of divine associations described in the later *Sādhanamālā*. The iconography of female musicians and a dancing deity carved in the shrine of cave 7 to the Buddha's right still remains puzzling, however (fig. 88). The dancing deity is generally labeled as being Tārā, yet there is no evidence to confirm that. Dance was an activity that became increasingly common with the iconography of female goddesses in the mature *Vajrayāna* pantheon, but there seems to be no connection between deities such as the four dancing goddesses described in the *Niṣpānnayogāvalī* or the *Sādhanamālā*, and the group in cave 7.[42] While dance and music played key roles in *Vajrayāna* ritual, the representation of such activities at Aurangabad need not necessarily be explained as part of esoteric rituals. Music was also important in *Mahāyana* Buddhism in association with the cult of images and *stūpas,* as passages from the *Maitreyasiṃhanāda* and the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra* clearly indi-

[42] Singing and dancing also played an important role in image worship performed by *Vajrayāna siddhas*, and such rituals are often mentioned in the *Yoginītantras*. See Davidson (2002, 223–24).

cate (Schopen 2005, 38 and 134). The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* states that with 'songs and instrumental music and dancing and musical instruments and cymbals and singing and trilling together, worship is to be done'. The many *gaṇas* making music with cymbals and tablas depicted around the bases of the pillars in Aurangabad caves 1 and 3 indicate that at the end of the fifth century, when Buddha images began to appear at Aurangabad, music was a key element in honoring the image and in recreating the palatial atmosphere appropriate for the regal Buddha residing in the cave. In the religious atmosphere of the eastern group of caves at Aurangabad, where female deities personify *mantras* and the magic evoked by sounds, it is not inconceivable that sonic aspects of the ritual were also made visual through female imagery. Occasionally in Buddhist texts there are references to female musicians, so the women depicted making music in the cave 7 shrine are not at all extraordinary.[43] What *is* extraordinary is that at Aurangabad, unlike at any other Buddhist rock-cut sites in the western Deccan, this imagery and practice were strongly emphasized.

Much like the rest of the imagery in the cave, the prominence given to ritual dance and music at Aurangabad anticipates atmospheres developed in the later tantric tradition. It is possible that a certain degree of competition and exchange with the Śaiva Pāśupatas triggered the significant development of such practices in the local Buddhist milieu. The Pāśupatas, who were quite popular in Malwa and in parts of Maharashtra at the time, incorporated music and dancing in their rituals. According to the Pāśupatas the process or *vidhi* for the attainment of liberation included five main sacred acts: covering one's body with ashes, lying down on ashes, mumbling *mantras*, circumambulation, and six 'definite practices.' These six practices consisted of laughing, singing, dancing, making a special sound known as Huḍukkāra, prostration, and inaudible repetition of *mantras*. Interestingly, the Pāśupata singing and dancing were to be performed following the canonical rules of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Choubey 1997, 95–96). Davidson noted that many of the irrational practices that were so important in later tantric rituals may have come directly from the Pāśupata tradition.

[43] References to women making music appear in early Buddhist texts such as the *Mahāvagga* (i, 504) and *Milindapañha* (IV, 6, 58). Female musicians appear in the Gandharan reliefs depicting Siddhārtha leaving the palace.

For example, he remarks that the 'Insane Vow' mentioned in the ninth century *Guhyasiddhi* is explained in terms that are consonant with the Pāśupata idiom (Davidson 2002, 222). Davidson also maintains that the Pāśupatas may be the origin for the diffusion of singing and dancing in Buddhism, especially in reference to the *Yoginītantra*. He notices that although many other non-Buddhist religious movements may have employed such performances in their rituals, the Pāśupatas performed following the standards outlined in the Brahmanical tradition. Speaking of this Śaiva sect, Davidson says: 'Their virtuosity in vocal song and structured forms of dance [was] perhaps an extension of their involvement in court life and missionary activity. Indeed, inscriptions about one of the Pāśupatas' successor movements, the Kālāmukhas, are replete with references to the musical and dramatic accomplishments of its representatives, including the employment of temple girls, *devadāsī,* for their performances' (Davidson 2002, 223).

All evidence suggests that the dancing deity represented in the shrine of Aurangabad cave 7 is not a dancing Tārā or fully developed esoteric imagery, an expression of tantric practices. Rather, this sculpture betokens the emergence of new iconographies as a result of the growing antagonistic exchange between the Buddhists and the Śaiva Pāśupatas in the region. Malleability was a necessary condition for the survival of Buddhism; while the competitive relationship may have led to the series of transformations outlined above, including the significant growth of rituals incorporating music and dancing, in some cases Buddhism did not survive the challenge. Verardi (2003) has suggested that it is precisely this conflictual relationship between Śaivas and Buddhists that eventually led to the extinction of Buddhism in some parts of the Deccan. A contributing factor was the decline of the mercantile patronage that had been traditionally associated with Buddhism. In many parts of north India Buddhists were able, not without internal struggles, to integrate more successfully values and rituals that were consonant with those of the feudal society, ensuring for themselves more long-lasting support. Tantric Buddhism seems to be the result of this successful transformation: what we see at Aurangabad is evidence of the first steps in this direction, a first attempt to mediate with the dominant Śaiva tradition supported by the feudal elite. It is clear that Buddhism in the upper regions of the Deccan Plateau eventually failed to gain full support of *sāmantas* (feudatories): after the establishment of the Buddhist caves at Ellora in the eighth century there seems to have been no more significant Buddhist activity in the region, except

for that at the Kanheri caves. Because of their position in the coastal area near the very active port of Kalyan, these caves continued to garner patronage until the twelfth century. In the eighth century Kanheri is referred to in tantric sources as a centre for Buddhist esoteric practices, and a major *siddha* is said to have come from this Buddhist establishment (Davidson 2002, 311–12).

5.6 Cave 9

Aurangabad cave 9, carved high on the cliff above caves 6 and 7, is a sprawling unit that marks the last phase of the Buddhist patronage at the site (fig. 6, 92). Its original rock ceiling collapsed and thus the rock has been consolidated by the Archaeological Survey of India. Possibly founded towards the end of the sixth century or at the very beginning of the seventh century, cave 9 was conceived on a grand scale, following a new plan not found at any other Buddhist site in the area. The cave has no cells; it consists of a large rectangular porch on which three distinct antechambers lead to three separate shrines (figs. 8, 98, 99, 100). The three antechambers are interconnected through small passages in the rock walls (figs. 95, 96, 97). The three-shrine layout is a major innovation. Was it part of the original design of the cave or was it the result of an afterthought? Given the political instability of the Aurangabad area at the end of the sixth century, in the Cālukya orbit of power, it is possible that the patrons, who originally may have intended to excavate a large unit with a sizeable hall, were not able to carry out their plans and thus made the layout more compact. The images decorating the cave display traces of paintings, suggesting that, despite the incomplete state of the three shrines, the cave was in use at some time.

The presence of three shrines in a single cave, whether part of the original design or not, reflects a new conceptualization of the ritual space. The same type of plan is found in the Śaiva cave temple of Mandapeshwar in Konkan attributed to the early Kalacuri rulers and dating to the beginning of the sixth century (figs. 139, 140). Much as in cave 9 at Aurangabad, the unusual truncated cave layout at Mandapeshwar, including a rectangular porch and three separate shrines, has been generally understood as the result of a hasty and incomplete rock-cutting effort. However, the occurrence of this unusual plan within the same geographical and chronological horizon is perhaps

not a coincidence. It is possible that the three-shrine plan with a rectangular court became conventional in the sixth century, possibly in Śaiva environments, and is one of those elements that diffused across different regions and religious traditions.

The plan of Aurangabad cave 9 is identical to that of the Śaiva cave 5 at Mogalrajapuram located in the Vijayavada area and ascribed to the eastern Cālukyas or to the Viṣṇukuṇḍins (fig. 141), and the same plan is found in Mogalrajapuram 2, in the 'main Akkanna-Maddanna upper cave', and in the main cave at Undavalli, both of which date to between the end of the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh (Soundara Rajan 1981, 245–54 and 283). All of these three rock-cut sanctuaries were Śaiva, and a Śiva *liṅga* was placed in the central shrine. In a study of later Pāśupata temples in the Dharwar district of Karnataka (approximately tenth to twelfth centuries), Filliozat (2001, 34–35) remarks that all the Pāśupata temples, unlike mainstream Śaiva establishments, included three shrines: one in the centre dedicated to Śiva, one on the right dedicated to Viṣṇu, and one on the left dedicated to Brahma or Sūrya. Through time the non-Śaiva deities in the side sancta were replaced by Śiva *liṅgas*, but the three-celled temple plan was popular enough to be adopted even in Vaiṣṇava contexts. In the ninth century this plan is also seen occasionally in structural temples in Rajasthan, most notably temple 3 at Amvan, studied by Viennot (1973), a rather unusual Vaiṣṇava monument, its left shrine dedicated to Gaṇeśa and the *Saptamātṛkās*.[44]

5.7 Colossal *Parinirvāṇa* and Four-armed Avalokiteśvara in Cave 9

Cave 9 presents iconographic themes that are broadly comparable to those found in cave 7. Groups of female figures and *bodhisattva*s dominate the scene, although from a stylistic point of view they appear much stiffer and less exuberant than those carved in earlier caves (fig. 95). One large icon stands out on the left wall of the damaged cave 9 *maṇḍapa*; it is a 5.6-metres-long Buddha in *parinirvāṇa* with a four armed Avalokiteśvara carved at its feet (fig. 93). This monumental

[44] The temples of Menal in Rajasthan and that of Bajra Math in Gyaraspur, Madhya Pradesh have a similar layout.

image in a rectangular recess was painted in antiquity as faint traces of pigment are still visible on its body. The most immediate comparison for this *parinirvāṇa* is the colossal dying Buddha carved on the left wall of the late fifth century *caitya* hall 26 at Ajanta (fig. 151).

The *Parinirvāṇa* image type found at Ajanta and Aurangabad was not indigenous to the western Deccan. The earliest examples of this iconography, so popular all over Asia, were developed in Gandhara during the Kuṣāṇa period. The smaller Gandharan *parinirvāṇas* were always part of narrative relief series depicting Śākyamuni's life story attached to small schist *stūpas* in Buddhist sacred areas. In the Gandharan narrative image sets the *nirvāṇa* image was consistently placed towards the end of the Buddha's life sequence, following the chronology of the narrative. It was usually followed by scenes representing the division and transportation of relics and/or by images of the *bodhisattva* Maitreya seated in Tuṣīta heaven, which marked simultaneously the end and the beginning of the circular narration. However, *parinirvāṇa* images in Gandhara were also carved on false gables or square *harmikās* of larger *stūpas* (fig. 150) where, along with a selection of salient moments of the Buddha's life such as the birth and the first sermon, they held a more 'iconic' status. The emphasis on images of the death of the Buddha in the northwest may be explained in connection with the tremendous importance that relic worship had in the region, and it may have constituted the basis for the development of a cult for the future Buddha Maitreya, also strong in Gandhara. In North India during the Gupta period *parinirvāṇa* images appear in a few Sarnath *stelae* along with depictions of other salient events of the Buddha's life.

Also in Gandhara, during a more mature phase of artistic production, possibly at the beginning of the fifth century, a trend toward making Buddha images larger than life-size emerged. Monumental sculptures in stucco and schist appeared in Buddhist sacred areas, installed in chapels in the vicinity of *stūpas* at many sites in the Peshawar basin. A good example of this tendency towards monumentality can be seen in the court of Takht-i-Bahi, where small image niches alternate with colossal ones (fig. 128; Behrendt 2004, 9 and 281).[45] The

[45] Monumental standing Buddhas are also found in the Buddhist caves of the Kucha oasis, which had close connections with the Gandharan world as well as in Yungang, Northern China.

Chinese pilgrim Fa Xian in the fifth century confirms this trend. He mentions seeing in the Darel valley of northern Pakistan a 100-foot-tall (about 30 metres) wooden statue of a seated Maitreya, testimony that was corroborated later by Xuan Zang (Legge 1886, ch. 6, 24; Beal 1906, III, 134). According to the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa sūtra* the colossal size of Maitreya seems to have been a specific physical feature of this *bodhisattva* (Conze 1959, 238). Other *bodhisattva*s or Buddha Śākyamuni himself, were imagined as being rather short: this is spelled out in the twenty-third chapter of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*: 'The Lord Śākyamuni, the Tathāgatas etc., is short of stature, and so are the *bodhisattva mahāsattvas*…'. However, in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* this particular attribute does not indicate a diminution of power. To the contrary, it works to amplify the miraculous nature of these enlightened beings that magnify their size to occupy the entire universe. *Mahāyāna* literature is full of descriptions of Tathāgatas who fly through the air across different worlds and multiply their own images in number or size. Perhaps the diffusion of monumentality in Buddhist sculpture is a visual reflection of those superhuman aspects highlighted in the *sūtras*.

In the archaeological records monumental *parinirvāṇas* are less common than images of standing Buddhas, and many of them seem to appear during the fifth century. A colossal Gupta Buddha in *parinirvāṇa* still exists today at Kushinagara in North India, the location of the Buddha's death (Ghosh 1996, II, 274). In Gandhara the few monumental *parinirvāṇas* that survive are all concentrated in Afghanistan at Shotorak, Bamiyan, and Tapa Sardar.[46] The colossal *parinirvāṇa* at Bamiyan was celebrated in the Chinese sources of the Tang period, and recent archaeological excavations have confirmed the authenticity of the ancient accounts (Kuwayama 2005). A 12-metres-long *parinirvāṇa* has also been found at the Buddhist site of Adjina Tapa in Uzbekistan. This complex was apparently destroyed in the eighth century; thus we have a useful *terminus ante quem* for the date of the monumental image (Albaum and Brentjes 1972, fig. 209).

[46] These *parinirvāṇas* were indeed colossal: the rock-cut one at Bamiyan originally must have measured 19 metres while the one in stucco from Tapa Sardar dating to the eighth century was 18.5 metres long. Almost life-size *parinirvāṇas* have been found attached to the plinth of the main *stūpa* at Bhamala, *stūpa* 1 in court A of the Dharmarajika complex, and *stūpa* TK73 at Hadda (Behrendt 2004, 279).

It seems that the *parinirvāṇa* carved at Aurangabad 9 was part of a wave of diffusion of monumental images of the deceased Buddha that spread across the Buddhist world between the fifth and eighth centuries CE. In the western Deccan, monumental *parinirvāṇa*s are found not only in Ajanta cave 26, dating to the end of the fifth century (fig. 151), but also in cave 14 at Dhamnar, a rock-cut site between Ujjain and Kota that was probably established between the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth (fig. 152).[47] The *parinirvāṇa* from Dhamnar is carved on the right side of the circumambulatory path of the cave and is flanked by an image of the Buddha in *dhyānāsana* very similar to the one carved in the sanctum of cave 5 at Aurangabad. Although it is in ruins, we can see that the Dhamnar monumental *nirvāṇa* image has similarities to the one carved in Aurangabad cave 9.

The sculpture of the dying Buddha in Aurangabad 9 is completely disassociated from a *stūpa* or from any other effigies that can be related to the Buddha's life (fig. 93). Unlike Ajanta cave 26, where the scene of Māra's temptation was sculpted near the image of the dying Buddha, the *parinirvāṇa* in cave 9 is in the outer part of the cave, next to a multi-armed Avalokiteśvara in *varādamudrā* (fig. 94), and what survives of the *maṇḍapa* is crowded with female figures. It seems that the *parinirvāṇa* at Aurangabad was not intended to reference a specific event in Śākyamuni's career but instead was understood by the devotees in a more universal way: as emblematic of a stage, of a passage, of 'the death' as a prelude to the rebirth. By the time the Aurangabad *parinirvāṇa* was completed at the end of the sixth century, the *Mahāyāna* aspiration to attain a better rebirth in a special Buddha field was common among the Buddhist practitioners. For example Schopen points out that the rebirth in Sukhāvatī was a generalized religious goal in many *Mahāyāna sūtras* by the sixth century (Schopen 2005, 180). The rebirth in this specific Buddha field is generally described as obtainable through the practice of ritual acts.

It is possible that at Aurangabad the presence of the *parinirvāṇa* reflects an important concern of those who practiced *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in the sixth century, as this image visually encapsulates the notions of death and rebirth in a Buddha field that all the *Mahāyāna*

[47] The Dhamnar caves also share interesting affinities with the Buddhist site of Bagh, by the Narmada river. In particular, the small rock-cut *stūpa* carved in Dhamnar cave 14 is identical to that carved in cave 2 at Bagh.

devotees strived for. If so, the presence of a four-armed Avalokiteśvara in *varādamudrā*, the savior *bodhisattva* at the feet of the *parinirvāṇa,* makes perfect sense. His gesture of fulfillment of a vow may in fact be a direct reference to Avalokiteśvara granting a better rebirth in a Buddha field to the devotees. The combination *parinirvāṇa*-Avalokiteśvara is unique to Aurangabad.

The *varādamudrā* displayed by the multi-armed Avalokiteśvara in cave 9 is not a gesture usually associated in western Deccan with this particular *bodhisattva* who, as a saviour, tends to appear in *abhāyamudrā* to reassure his devotees, as in the *aṣṭamahābhaya* icon in Aurangabad cave 7 (fig. 71). I have argued earlier in this book that the *varādamudrā* or gesture of fulfilling a vow displayed by Buddhas appears to have been especially popular during the last period of activity at Ajanta, where it might have alluded to the granting of a better rebirth on behalf of the Buddhas. We should remember that Avalokiteśvara was first and foremost an associate of Amitābha in Sukhāvatī. In the Sanskrit version of the *Longer Sukhāvatī sūtra*, Avalokiteśvara is described as a *bodhisattva* that, having departed the earthly Buddha field, was reborn in the Land of Bliss (Gomez 1996, 97–98). In the *Amitāyurdhyāna sutra*, a Pure Land text that is preserved only in Chinese and thus may not be of Indian origin, it is stated that Avalokiteśvara helps the Buddha Amitābha in delivering universal salvation (Studholme 2002, 49). Thus, I propose that the effigy of Avalokiteśvara in *varādamudrā* at the feet of the *parinirvāṇa* in Aurangabad cave 9 alludes to another important job that this savior *bodhisattva* may have been linked to: that of fulfilling the promise of rebirth in a different realm, because of his capacity as a mediator between different Buddha fields. It is not necessary to resort to the Pure Land *sūtras* to explain Avalokiteśvara's role as a facilitator of a devotee's rebirth in a transcendental realm. The sixth chapter of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* states that Avalokiteśvara's six-syllable formula has the power of generating positive rebirths for those who repeat it. The seventh chapter of this same *sūtra* tells us that Avalokiteśvara came down from Sukhāvatī or Amitābha's Pure Land to meet the Buddha (Studholme 2002, 150–151):

> Śākyamuni asks Avalokiteśvara where he has come from and if he has brought beings to maturity. 'Just as the Lord has ordered' replies Avalokiteśvara, 'thus have I established the levels of my activity.' The Buddha congratulates him. Then, Avalokiteśvara presents Śākyamuni with some lotus flowers. They are, the *bodhisattva* reports, sent by the

tathāgata Amitābha who asks that Śākyamuni be free from pain and disease, and have good health and enjoyment of the senses.

This passage clearly shows that Avalokiteśvara was indeed understood as moving freely between the world of Śākyamuni and Amitābha's Pure Land, which would make him an ideal candidate for the job of delivering a better rebirth to his devotee. The Chinese tradition emphasizes his ability of granting rebirth in Amitābha's Buddha field: a good example is an inscribed cloth painting from Dunhuang that depicts Avalokiteśvara with attendants and donors. The inscription, dating to the year 910, expresses the patron's hope that through Avalokiteśvara's intercession his parents may be reborn in the Pure Land (Williams 1989, 232). It is possible that in some ways the Aurangabad image of Avalokiteśvara in *varādamudrā*, so closely connected to the *parinirvāṇa*, alludes, *mutatis mutandis*, to a comparable trait associated with this *bodhisattva* in sixth century India.

The image of Avalokiteśvara in Aurangabad cave 9 is especially interesting because it is one of the earliest surviving examples of a multi-armed *bodhisattva* (fig. 94).[48] In his top right hand he holds the rosary; his lower right hand is in *varādamudrā* and the lower left holds a long-stemmed lotus flower (the top left forearm has been broken off). Multi armed *bodhisattva*s are especially common in the tantric visual repertoire illustrated in the *Sādhanamālā*. This text describes a form of Lokeśvara with four arms: he carries in the two upper hands a rosary and a lotus much like the multi-armed *bodhisattva* in Aurangabad cave 9, while the remaining two are joined in *añjalimudrā*. The *Sādhanamālā* describes Lokeśvara as being accompanied by Maṇidhara and by Ṣaḍakṣarī *mahāvidyā*, the female deity who embodies his six syllable mantra *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ*. Unfortunately, there are no other figures in Aurangabad cave 9 that could function as early representations of this tantric group. However if we consider that the *Mahaparinirvāṇa* is not emphasized in the tantric tradition, a *Mahāyāna* reading of the combination Avalokiteśvara plus *parinirvāṇa* seems more appropriate. That Avalokiteśvara takes the form of a multi-armed god at Aurangabad does not point to *Tantra*. The *Kāraṇḍavyūha* is a *Mahāyāna sūtra* that revolves around the notion that Avalokiteśvara is a Buddhist *iśvara;* thus his iconography could

[48] The concept of a multi-armed deity in Indian art is treated in detail by Srinivasan (1997).

well incorporate the multiple arms. He is described in this text as the Buddhist counterpart of Śiva, who can assume all sorts of forms, and Śiva was usually represented with many arms, especially four, as in the case of many rock-carved images from the Great Cave of Elephanta.[49] Thus the multi-armed Avalokiteśvara in Aurangabad 9, much like several icons in caves 6 and 7, can be explained as a Buddhist iconographic formula created in response to the Śaiva elements dominating the area. Only in this sense can the multi-armed Avalokiteśvara be labeled as 'proto-tantric'.

5.8 A Cave for the Saptamātṛkās, Gaṇeśa, and the Buddha

One of the most puzzling features of the eastern group of caves at Aurangabad is the presence at the edge of the site of a small and unfinished cave with life-size sculptures of the *Saptamātṛkās,* Gaṇeśa, and three Buddhas in *dhyānāsana* (figs. 50, 52, 53). Access to the cave is partially obstructed by big blocks of rock still in situ, and it is hard to place this unit in the chronological sequence of the Aurangabad caves (fig. 5). Its location at the western margin of the group suggests that this so-called brahmanical cave was established after caves 6 and 7. It is also difficult to say whether the presence of *mātṛkās* and seated Buddhas together in this small and incomplete unit was part of the original plan or if the Buddha images were added later.

The presence of *Saptamātṛkās* along with Śiva and Gaṇeśa at Aurangabad does not come as a surprise because we have been able to trace the growing influence of Śaiva traditions throughout the last phase of activity at this Buddhist site. In fact *Saptamātṛkās* images occur at many rock-cut Śaiva temples in the western Deccan that have been linked to the patronage of the early Kalacuri rulers. At Elephanta they are carved in the right chapel of the Great Cave's east court (figs. 153, 154, 155) and they also appear in caves 14 and 21 at Ellora (fig. 159) as well as in the Śaiva cave at Dhoke.[50] The Cālukyas, who occupied the region to the southeast of the Kalacuri and fought with them for

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[49] In the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* the *bodhisattva* is never described as having four arms, yet his magic formula *Ṣaḍakṣarī vidyā* in chapter 2.4 is described as a four-armed deity holding the lotus and the rosary, having the remaining two arms in the *mudrā* of Sarvarājendrā (*añjalimudrā*) (Studholme 2002, 144).

[50] The prcise location of the *Saptamātṛkās* in the Great Cave is illustrated in a plan by Michell (2202, 24–25).

control of parts of Maharashtra, also emphasized the *Saptamātṛkās* cult, as they claimed to descend from these mother goddesses.[51] The set of rock-cut *Saptamātṛkās* in the Ravana Phadi cave at Aihole was sponsored by the Cālukyas in a location that was at the very heart of their empire.

In the unfinished cave at Aurangabad the female goddesses are aligned on a high socle on the left and on the back wall of the unit (fig. 50). Cāmuṇḍā, who generally ends the visual lithany of the mothers, is carved on the back wall of the cave next to a large Gaṇeśa image. Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī is represented to the proper left of the central Gaṇeśa (fig. 52). The *Saptamātṛkās* were standing on their *vāhanas,* now completely obliterated. Opening the sequence of the deities is a four-armed Śiva whose body proportions are similar to the four armed Avalokiteśvara in cave 9 (fig. 51). Śiva in the form of Vīrabhadra is often associated with the mothers: at Aurangabad he holds in his upper left hand an axe, one of the weapons characteristic of this form of the god, while in his lower left he holds the *mālā*. Śiva's right arms are damaged, but it is possible that his lower right hand rested on the scarf tied at his hip. It is noteworthy that Śiva as Vīrabhadra does not seem to display at Aurangabad the terrifying connotations associated with later iconography. The first of the mothers represented right after the god Śiva is Brāhmī, with her typical ascetic hairdo and with her right hand in *abhayamudrā,* holding the *mālā*. Unfortunately, the attributes of the other mothers following Brāhmī are completely obliterated, but we can presume that the figures represented in sequence are the goddesses Kaumarī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, and Aindrī. All of these *mātṛkās* have curvy bodies, with round breasts and hips, and stand in different poses, creating a flowing rhythm in the composition. The series ends with an image of Cāmuṇḍā carved on the back wall (fig. 50). Cāmuṇḍā, unlike the other mothers, is represented frontally, is larger, and appears more hieratic than the rest of the female deities. At Aurangabad she does not have a terrifying look, and the sword is the only attribute mentioned in the *Devīmāhātmya*

[51] A Cālukya copperplate inscription from Nasik dating to the end of the seventh century and written in characters that are very close to those of the early Kalacuri epigraphs celebrates the ancestors of the dynasty as descendants of Hāritī brought up by the Seven Mothers. This statement was a *topos* in Cālukya inscriptions in general (Mirashi 1955, 137–45).

that can be clearly recognized.[52] Considering that the *Saptamātṛkās* at Aurangabad still display some generic and motherly traits characteristic of earlier female goddesses and lack the specific and often daunting *śaktī*-like attributes of later images, it is possible that they reflect a stage immediately preceding the canonization of the iconography.

The earliest datable *Saptamātṛkās* representations are all concentrated within a localized area covering eastern Rajasthan, western Madhya Pradesh, southern Gujarat, Maharashtra, and northwestern Karnataka. This is the extent of the cultural region from which the carvers of the caves at Aurangabad drew their visual and conceptual language, thus explaining why the cult of these seven goddesses became important in the Aurangabad cultural basin. The first securely datable images can be found at the Udayagiri caves in Madhya Pradesh, dating to the fifth century CE. At this site, established by the Gupta rulers, there are three sets of rock-cut *Saptamātṛkās* in small chapels adjacent to the Śaiva caves 4 and 6. At Udayagiri, much as at Aurangabad, the goddess Cāmuṇḍā still appears in a benign form. In the fifth century, images of the goddesses began to be more widespread: sets are found near Udayagiri in the area of the villages of Badoh and Pathari, and in Rajasthan, where the *mātṛkās* from Baroli near Kota and those from Vidisha (Besnagar) anticipate in style the figures of the *vidyārājñīs* with full breasts carved in caves 6 and 7 at Aurangabad (Schastok 1985, 67–69). Only in the sixth century, however, did the *Saptamātṛkā* cult become truly popular. Good examples of the triumph of this imagery in the western parts of India are the sets of goddesses from Tanesara and Shamalaji, as well as the many loose *mātṛkās* and related sculptures from the Mandasor area (Schastok 1985, 71–85). The female goddesses from Amjhara in Rajasthan, while different from those represented in the so-called Brahmanical cave at Aurangabad, are so akin in style to the imagery of Aurangabad caves 2, 6, and 7, dating to the sixth century, that we can hypothesize connections between this area and the Aurangabad region, connections that eventually led to the diffusion of the *mātṛkās* cult in the western Deccan (Schastok 1985, figs. 62–74).

The early Kalacuris, who seem to have been originally from the lower Narmada valley and whose inscriptions demonstrate their presence in Gujarat, may have served as a channel for the diffusion of

[52] The *Devīmāhātmya* is a chapter of the *Skanda Purāṇa* and the ultimate source for information on the cult and iconography of the Seven Mothers (Coburn 1984).

the cult and imagery of the seven goddesses in the Aurangabad area. If the early Kalacuri rulers were indeed the sponsors of many of the rock-cut monuments in Konkan and in the Aurangabad region such as Elephanta, Mandapeshwar, Jogeshwari, and Ellora 21, then the connections that can be traced between the sculptural idiom of these caves and that of the area of Mandasor or Shamalaji can be explained. The Śaiva sculptures from Elephanta appear so closely related to the sculptural fragments from Khilchipura near Mandasor (Schastok 1985, plate LIX), dated by Schastok to the year 530 CE, that is almost impossible to exclude any contacts between these two centers. Whether the early Kalacuris controlled both areas, or if they were responsible for recruiting sculptors and transferring specialized craftsmanship from the area of Mandasor to Konkan and to the Aurangabad region is difficult to determine. The latter hypothesis should not be excluded; it makes sense that artists would move to places with better patronage, and the early Kalacuris were certainly the catalyst for an artistic rebirth in Konkan. In general, the entirety of the sixth century sculptural production at Aurangabad seems to be related in visual idiom to that of the Mandasor and Shamalaji areas. The early Kalacuri dynasty may have functioned as a bridge between these regions not only for the diffusion of a new visual idiom but also for the dissemination of the Śaiva ideology it expressed.

The *mātṛkās* images from Aurangabad (fig. 50) are especially close to those found at Ellora 21 (fig. 159) and at Elephanta in Konkan, monuments that fully participated in the sixth century artistic *koine* that spread across southeast Rajasthan, Gujarat, and western Maharashtra and was essentially linked to Śaivism. The *mātṛkās* carved in a chapel of the east court of the Elephanta Great Cave (figs. 153, 154, 155) share with those from Aurangabad the overall composition scheme, positions, body shapes, and placement of *vāhanas*, although the animals have been obliterated. At both sites the *mātṛkās* series begins with Śiva, ends with Gaṇeśa, and includes images of Cāmuṇḍā as well as of Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī (Meister 1986, 233–46). The image of Durgā at Aurangabad recalls very much that of a female goddess seen in a large sculptural panel from a Brahmanical cave at Bhokardan, about 60 kilometres east of Aurangabad.[53] Unfortunately, this large cave is

[53] See American Institute of Indian Studies Photo Archive, acc. no. 92673, neg. no. 684.22. On this cave, see Soundara Rajan (1981, 160–63).

unfinished, and the sculptural panels in it are so poorly preserved that it is impossible to determine the specific subjects represented and the affiliation of the cave. The size and layout of this rock-cut unit, however, are very like those of the largest cave in the third unfinished cluster at Aurangabad, on another slope of the same massif.

The origin and symbolic meaning of the *Saptamātṛkās* iconography have been studied in detail.[54] The cult of these goddesses became especially popular around the sixth and seventh centuries at a time when tantric traditions began to take 'visible' shape in Hindu religiosity. In a unique inscription from Gangdhar in Rajasthan, dating to the fifth century, the mothers are explicitly placed in connection with the *Tantras*. Whether the word *tantra* in this inscription was intended in its actual meaning or as a synonym for *mantra,* as suggested by some scholars, is hard to say (Lorenzen 2006, 71–72). However, in the Varāhamira's *Bṛhat Saṃhitā,* which in its first form dates roughly to the sixth century, those who worship the *mātṛkās* are referred to unambiguously as 'they who *know* the *maṇḍala* of the mothers', which clearly implies that a form of esotericism was attached to the cult of these deities in specific environments.[55] The same text also mentions that the *Saptamātṛkās* are part of a *maṇḍala* drawn by the priest in the circumstance of the royal ablution or *abhiṣeka*, where the goddesses appear together with planets and stars, with Skanda, Viṣṇu, and other protective deities (Bhatt 1996, I, 412). The Seven Mothers are also present in the *maṇḍala* described in the Buddhist *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa,* where they are positioned in the intermediate sphere of the diagram right by the south gate, along with Yama, at the level of other figures associated with protection (Macdonald 1962, 117).

The ascent in popularity of these goddesses in medieval times may have been a result not only of their generic affiliation with Śaivism, which was a key force at the time, but also, more specifically, of their association with the warrior god Skanda. They embodied the bellicose aspects that suited the character and needs of the feudal princes of the period. It is possible, therefore, that the mother-goddess images carved in side chapels of virtually all of the rock-cut monuments linked to the early Kalacuri in Maharashtra may have functioned simultaneously on several levels, as deities protective of kingship and as objects of esoteric

[54] Most relevant is the volume by Harper (1989).
[55] *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* 60.19 (Coburn 1984, 32).

forms of worship. Especially at Aurangabad, in a non-Śaiva context, the traditionally apotropaic role of the mothers may have been dominant.

A passage from the *Kādambarī* by Bāṇa illustrates that in the seventh century the cult of the mother goddesses still consisted of a mix of traditional folk beliefs and tantric rituals, and the *mātṛkās* retained their attributes of fertility, auspiciousness, and protection even in a clear tantric milieu. The protagonist of this passage was a queen called Vilāsvati, who performed all sorts of rituals in order to have a son. The setting of the scene is Ujjain, a town that historically had very close ties with the Aurangabad-Ajanta region. The queen

> …slept within the temples of [Caṇḍikā], dark with the smoke of *guggulu* ceaselessly burnt, on a bed of clubs covered with green grass…; she stood in the midst of a circle (*maṇḍala*) drawn by great magicians, in a place where the four roads meet, on the fourteenth night of the dark fortnight…; she honoured the shrines of the siddhas and sought the houses of neighbouring *mātṛkās*; she carried about little caskets of mantras filled with birch-leaves written over in yellow letters;…she daily threw out lumps of flesh in the evening for the jackals; she told pandits the wonders of her dreams, and at the cross-roads she offered oblation to Śiva.

Lorenzen (1991, 16–17) points out that this description blends the tantric atmosphere with traditional rites linked to the propitiation of fertility, the crossroads being a classic reference to traditional places of fertility rituals (Ridding 1974, 55–56).[56]

The relationship between the *Saptamātṛkās* cult and the formation of Śakta Śaivism and *Tantra* is a complex issue that is beyond the scope of this study. However, the increased diffusion of *Saptamātṛkās* iconography overlaps, geographically and chronologically, with the growing importance of Śaiva ascetic communities such as the Pāśupata or the Kālāmukhas, who followed the Pāśupata discipline and who were influential in the conception of *Tantra*. These sects received major support in the areas around Aurangabad in the early medieval period from the same patrons who sponsored the *Saptamātṛkās* shrines. Both the early Gangdhar inscription and the later passage from Bāṇa cited

[56] Lorenzen suggests that the translation of the expression *mahānarendra* in the context of this passage is 'great magician' rather than 'the king himself', as it appears in the first translation of this text by Ridding.

above indicate that royal figures were actively involved in the patronage and cult of the mothers.[57]

In the sixth century CE Gaṇeśa and Śiva, in the form of Vīrabhadra or Vīṇādhara, became regulars in representations of the Seven Mothers.[58] It has been suggested that these two deities replaced the figures of Skanda and Kubera that were closely associated with the mothers in early visual arts. Groups of female goddesses represented in Mathura sculpture during the Kuṣāṇa period, likely prototypes for *Saptamātṛkās* iconography, generally included images of Skanda or Kubera. Only in the post-Gupta period did images of the mothers become consistently associated with Śiva and Gaṇeśa. Gaṇeśa emerged as a main and independent cult figure in the fifth century and acquired great prominence in the purāṇic tradition (Rocher 1991). The association of Gaṇeśa with the *gaṇas* as Śiva's warrior retinue functioned well in the context of *Saptamātṛkās* iconography, since the mothers were linked in many sources to the Śaiva warrior god Skanda (Harper 1989, 53–59).[59]

The conceptual similarities between Gaṇeśa as lord of the *gaṇas* and Kubera as an auspicious *yakṣa* deity were also very strong.[60] These two gods also share some basic physical features: they are somewhat grotesque figures, represented as potbellied beings replete with auspiciousness, and it is likely that some of the royal connotations of Kubera may have carried over to Gaṇeśa in the context of worship of the goddesses.[61] The surfacing of the god Gaṇeśa in the Aurangabad region during the sixth century may also have had something to do with the popularity of this particular deity among the Pāśupatas, a Śaiva sect supported by the early Kalacuri rulers. According to

[57] See also Harper (2002).

[58] This is true both for the art and textual sources. The *Devī Purāṇa,* composed in the middle of the sixth century, is the first to associate the mothers with the two Śaiva figures (Harper 1989, 126).

[59] This association may possibly be seen in the caves at Udayagiri dating to the beginning of the fifth century. However, R. Brown (1997) warns that this relationship, although complex, may be simply a function of these deities performing the same protective function and thus being placed at the margins of sacred areas.

[60] Lalou (1946) mentions that in two paintings collected by Paul Pelliot at Dunhuang and now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, there is a complete transfer between Kubera and Gaṇeśa: functions and epithets of Kubera are attached to Gaṇeśa, while Kubera shows Gaṇeśa's characteristics. Lalou points out that the two gods also appear to have interchangeable features in Tibetan texts such as the *Gaṇapatihṛdayadhāraṇī* and the *Gaṇapatihṛdaya.*

[61] On the connections between Kubera and Gaṇeśa and the emergence of Gaṇeśa as a fully fledged Hindu deity, see Dhavalikar (1997, 58–59).

Kauṇḍinya's commentary on the *Pāśupata sūtra*, an advanced practitioner who acquires the 'eight qualities', i.e., 'the state of being uncontrollable, the state of being not to be overpowered, the state of being not to be killed, fearlessness, indestructibility, freedom from old age and death and unobstructed movement' becomes Gaṇeśa or, as the text says '*gaṇapati-r-bhavati*' (Chakraborti 1970, n. 38, 93).

Gaṇeśa was granted a prominent position in the later Buddhist tradition. On the basis of a study of passages from the Tibetan canon dealing with Gaṇeśa, Wilkinson (1997, 235) notes that in the tantric Buddhist tradition the elephant-headed god 'is presented as a deity from whom food, wealth, sex and supernatural attainments may be attained by the practitioner.' It seems therefore that the essential qualities and powers attributed to Gaṇeśa by purāṇic sources remained unchanged in the later Buddhist tradition. Further, the esoteric texts that mention rituals associated with the elephant-headed god do not declare any affiliation to specific *Tantra* classes, as if the cult of this deity was beyond distinctions. In his analysis of the Buddhist tantric literature on Gaṇeśa, Wilkinson (1997, 235–36) also points out that this deity in many texts is represented as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, not surprising considering that the identity of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara incorporated aspects characteristic of Śiva-Maheśvara, as discussed earlier in this book.

The presence in the Buddhist caves at Aurangabad of *mātṛka* images along with Gaṇeśa thus can be explained as a manifestation of a widespread phenomenon that took over central India and the Deccan Plateau in the post-Gupta period: the rulers' adhesion to and promotion of Śaiva-Śakta religiosity. This royal support caused the proliferation of ascetic sects such as that of the Kāpālika, Kaula, and Lakulīśa Pāśupata that played a key role in the making of *Tantra*. Whether the cult of the seven goddesses was originally related to the creed of one of these Śaiva sects or was a cult beyond sectarianism, possibly associated with kingship, it is hard to say.[62] At any rate, the cult of the Seven

[62] Images of mothers were often included in Śaiva temples regardless of their sectarian affiliation. Filliozat (2001), however, remarks that the *Saptamātṛkās* represented a stable feature in the tenth to twelfth century temples affiliated with the Pāśupatas and Kālāmukhas in Karnataka. In these monuments the images of the seven goddesses were placed in the southwest corner of the structure, as dictated by the *Āgamas,* and images of Gaṇeśa and Durga Mahiṣāsuramardinī were often included in the iconography. It may be possible that a connection also existed between the cult of the *mātṛkās* and the later cult of *yoginī* in medieval times. Dehejia (1986) argues that many *yoginī*

Mothers was part of that fertile humus that nourished the growth of the tantric tradition. Rooted in traditional beliefs of fertility, protection and magic, the *Saptamātṛkās* were the product of the same type of religiosity revolving around magic and spells that led to the representation of the set of *vidyārājñīs* in cave 6, and in this sense the presence of sculptures of the Seven Mothers at Aurangabad is not at all idiosyncratic.

temples built between the ninth and twelfth centuries in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Orissa were under the supervision of the Kaula ascetics.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The caves at Aurangabad offer unique insights into how art interfaced with Buddhist practice in the western Deccan during the first 700 years of the Common Era. By relating the evidence available at Aurangabad to what we see in other rock-cut sites in the region, as well as to critically re-examined Buddhist inscriptions and texts, it has been possible to reframe our understanding of the Buddhist tradition in the Ajanta-Aurangabad area.

The rock-cut sites of Ajanta, Aurangabad, and Pitalkhora, established around the beginning of the Common Era, were all located away from the coast and the passes and appear to reflect a relatively independent tradition. They cannot be automatically associated to the rest of the caves carved all over the western Deccan simply on the basis of their date. Key architectural details in this particular group of sites indicate that the Buddhist caves in the Ajanta-Aurangabad area formed a relatively homogeneous system in which regional trends can be individuated. Those who were responsible for the caves located inland on the plateau consciously manipulated local visual idioms when developing new units. Art historians should take into account regional variations in cave architecture when formulating chronologies of Buddhist caves in the western Deccan. It is important to consider that pre-existing, archaic forms may have been purposefully cited in new caves.

Analysis of epigraphic evidence available in the caves corroborates the hypothesis that rock-cut Buddhist sites in the western Deccan grew in regional clusters. The provenance of donors cited in votive inscriptions is especially useful in reconstructing the network of connections that existed in antiquity among sites. The inscriptions also shed light on the movement of people and on the nature of the financial support these sites received. While it is now clear that many of these Buddhist centers relied on agriculture for their daily subsistence, the mercantile economy must have provided the vital funds necessary to implement major expansion and renovation of the caves. It is generally understood that in the western Deccan the growth of Buddhist sites was triggered by long-distance Indian Ocean trade under the Sātavāhana

rulers who controlled much of the Deccan Plateau and the ports of Konkan. Archaeological, literary, and epigraphic evidence suggests that the caves in the Ajanta-Aurangabad region thrived not only because of the trade economy linked to the Konkan ports, but also because they were providing merchandise to the emporium of Ujjain in the ancient region of Malwa and to the port of Bharuch (ancient Barygaza) in southern Gujarat.

The *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* mentions that the town of Barygaza under the Mahākṣatrapa rulers was a major international shipping center for goods coming from the Aurangabad area, such as onyx from Paithan and cloth from Ter. It is likely that the foundation of the Buddhist caves at Aurangabad and possibly the establishment of a second *caitya* hall at Ajāntā in the first century CE were related to the growing influence in those areas of the Mahākṣatrapas and their ruler Nahapāna, who sought to control economic resources vital to their own long-distance business.

Crucial to an understanding of the first century Buddhist tradition of the Aurangabad area is that Mahākṣatrapas not only were involved in Indian Ocean trade but also facilitated long-distance commerce via land with the northwest region of the Indian Subcontinent. A few luxury objects imported into Gandhara that can be linked to areas in the vicinity of Aurangabad testify to the existence of such contacts. The town of Ujjain, a stronghold of Mahākṣatrapa power, must have played a key role in international trade as a distribution point for goods coming from the Western Deccan and destined for various markets.

As we begin to form a better picture of the international networks in which the Ajanta-Aurangabad area was involved around the beginning of the Common Era, we should not forget that the region of Andhra Pradesh was also related through trade to this part of the Western Deccan. Several inscriptions from Buddhist caves in the western Deccan indicate that there was a significant influx of donors from the Amaravati area. Thus it should not surprise us that religious structures, such as *caityas*, that were ubiquitous in the early cave sites of the western Deccan show conceptual affinities with comparable constructions found at Buddhist sites in Andhra Pradesh.

One of the major puzzling aspects of the Buddhist caves at Aurangabad is the lack of a sizeable monastic residence established at the time the complex was created. It is possible that a *vihāra* existed at the margin of the western group of caves in proximity of the *caitya* no. 4, where the rock cliff has since collapsed. Even if this structure did exist,

however, it must have been small, not comparable to the major residential caves of other sites in the area such as Ajanta or Pitalkhora. Apparently the Aurangabad caves never hosted a large monastic component; instead, this complex appears to have relied mostly on secular groups of the Buddhist community, a feature that characterized the life of the site throughout the centuries.

Sometime at the end of the first century CE Buddhist rock-cutting activities stopped in the Ajanta-Aurangabad region, and not until the end of the fifth century did expansion of rock-cut sites in that area occur. The long break in patronage did not necessarily imply that the sites were abandoned; there is some evidence that Buddhism may have continued to be practiced in the region although on a marginal scale. It is clear that throughout this *interregnum* in patronage, trade slowed in the Aurangabad region. The resumption of large-scale patronage in the Ajanta-Aurangabad region in the fifth century relates, I contend, to the strategic position that the Vatsagulma branch of the Vākāṭaka occupied in the local, newly revived mercantile economy. The great protagonists of Indian Ocean trade at this time were the Sasanians from Iran and the Axumites from the Horn of Africa. These groups are immortalized in the majestic paintings at Ajanta, along with the trade goods exchanged, notably imported metal vessels, wine, and local cotton textiles exported abroad. The *Christian Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes, which captures the early sixth century Indian Ocean scenario, mentions the cotton exported from the port of Kalyan in Konkan. Such textiles were likely the products of areas of fertile black cotton soil (*raigar*) in the upper parts of the Aurangabad plateau. These productive areas were controlled at the end of the fifth century by the Vākāṭakas and their feudatories, who eventually obtained full control of the territory when the Vākāṭaka power faded away. To such local rulers, can be assigned the patronage of caves 1, 3, and 4a at Aurangabad, patronage that inaugurated the new phase of expansion of the site. These caves, with the exception of the small shrine 4a, are all based on the layout of the grand *vihāras* sponsored by the Vākāṭaka court at Ajanta. The aesthetics pervading these units at Aurangabad, however, is very different: the excess in ornamentation is almost like a statement of grandeur by the patrons, seeming to want to outdo the imperial caves at Ajanta. The magnificent life-size sculpted devotees in the shrine of cave 3, who could well be the princely patrons of the cave, indicate the desire of these powerful figures to leave a long-lasting imprint of their power. They may represent the Aśmaka rulers

who, based on a reading of the *Daśakumāracarita* proposed by Spink, were responsible for overthrowing the Vākāṭaka regime. However, the complete lack of inscriptions in this cave and throughout the site prevents certain identification of the donors.

Cave 3 was once decorated with paintings, now mostly obliterated. What remains is the exuberantly carved pillared hall, which transforms the austere cave setting into a palatial environment. Much of the Buddhist iconography from this cave suggests that the Buddha was deliberately assimilated to a king; such a metaphor, expressed here on a visual level, has a counterpart in many *Mahāyāna sūtras*. This brings us to the vexing issue of the diffusion of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in the Ajanta-Aurangabad region, a topic that has been discussed by several scholars of Buddhism. My observations here are limited to considerations that a cave site like Ajanta may have been a mixed monastery, where those who followed *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* and *Mahāyāna* coexisted, and that *Mahāyāna* took over when imperial patronage collapsed at this site. At Aurangabad the *Mahāyāna* devotees probably dominated, since excavation activities resumed at the end of the fifth century.

Between the end of the fifth century and the very beginning of the sixth, right around the time when Aurangabad was expanded by local rulers, the Hūṇās from the northwest of the Subcontinent entered the Indian historical scenario. At the very beginning of the sixth century they were established in Malwa, a region that historically had close ties with the Ajanta-Aurangabad region. It is possible that, contrary to what was previously believed, these foreign rulers contributed to decreasing the cultural distance between the Gandharan region and the western Deccan, creating an important channel for the movement of Buddhist ideas.

Cave 2 at Aurangabad, established at the beginning of the sixth century, shows a distinct break with the Vākāṭaka artistic and architectural models. The plan of cave 2 is completely new: a shrine surrounded by a *pradakṣiṇāpatha* filled with panels donated by ordinary members, mostly lay, of the Buddhist community. The standardized iconography of the sculptures haphazardly placed on the walls seems to be linked to the visual atmospheres evoked in many *Mahāyāna sūtras*. In particular, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*, which was already known at Ajanta at the end of the fifth century, may have inspired some of the imagery in the votive panels. At the same time, the standardization and universality of this body of sculpture suggests that such images

may have functioned as emblems for the hopes of salvation held by those who practiced *Mahāyāna*.

Bodhisattvas are very prominent in Aurangabad cave 2, although their iconographies do not appear to have been fixed yet. The large *bodhisattvas* guarding the cave 2 shrine seem to usher in the ideological and religious changes of the early medieval period: Avalokiteśvara, who carries an effigy of the Buddha Amitābha in his ascetic hairdo, had begun to assume features found in later esoteric forms of this deity. I do not think we can refer to these images as tantric, however. Rather, it seems that elements established within Śaiva imagery and theology made their way into the Buddhist world at this time. The iconography of cave 2 at Aurangabad conveys the atmosphere outlined in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha sūtra*, which celebrates the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara as a Buddhist *iśvara*.

The popularity of Śaivism in the western Deccan was a phenomenon amplified at the beginning of the sixth century by the presence of the early Kalacuris, who were devout Pāśupatas. These kings extended their sphere of influence from southern Gujarat and Malwa, their homeland and stronghold of the Pāśupatas, to the western Deccan and Konkan. The establishment at the beginning of the sixth century of several rock-cut Śaiva monuments in Konkan and in the Aurangabad region suggests that the growing popularity of Śaivism may have posed a challenge to Buddhism and its patronage in those areas. Incorporating some of the visual and conceptual elements associated with this Hindu tradition may have been seen as a necessary step to take for the survival of the Buddhist tradition.

A new cluster of caves at Aurangabad on a nearby slope of the same massif, carved sometime during the middle of the sixth century, offers insight into the introduction of tantric Buddhism. The iconography of caves 6, 7, and 9 of this eastern group of caves unfolds within the parameters of *Mahāyāna*. The *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara, the one who better reconciles the differences between Śaivaism and Buddhism, continued to be a very prominent icon at Aurangabad throughout the sixth century. However, the dominating presence in cave 6 of the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi, who historically played the role of the protector of the *dharma* and the forceful defeater of those who opposed it, indicates the increasing instability of the Buddhist ethos in an environment dominated by Hindu ideologies and practices. In this milieu goddess sculptures took over the iconography of the caves, not as fully fledged tantric deities but rather as embodiments of magic

practices that, although important in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, eventually dominated the religious landscape of tantrism. Cave 9, the last excavation undertaken at the site, captures the subtleties of these important changes. The colossal *parinirvāṇa* right next to a four-armed Avalokiteśvara in this cave, configured with three separate shrines, confirms that many elements established in Śaiva art and architecture in the western Deccan, Konkan, and southern Gujarat had become part of the local Buddhist tradition.

The last phase of activity at Aurangabad represents a crucial time of transformation of the Buddhist tradition that is not documented in written sources. Later tantric texts may be marginally helpful in decoding the complex iconographies at this site, because the visual elements at Aurangabad capture the gestational phase of the tantric tradition, which fully flourished in north India shortly thereafter. In essence, what we see in the late phase of activity at Aurangabad is not, I believe, fully tantric, but rather proto- or pre-tantric. However, the caves at Aurangabad elucidate the complex relationships between Śaivism and Buddhism that eventually paved the way for the diffusion of Buddhist esoteric practices. The rising popularity of Śaiva-Pāśupata cults in the western Deccan led to important changes in the local Buddhist tradition, but at the same time it dealt a fatal blow to the Buddhist patronage and practice in the Aurangabad area. Aside from the eighth century Buddhist caves at Ellora, no other major Buddhist rock-cut complex was established in the Ajanta-Aurangabad region during the seventh and eighth centuries, when Buddhism declined in this area where for the first 600 years of the current era it had thrived.

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INDEX

ILLUSTRATION SECTION



Figure 1. Map of India with location of Aurangabad.

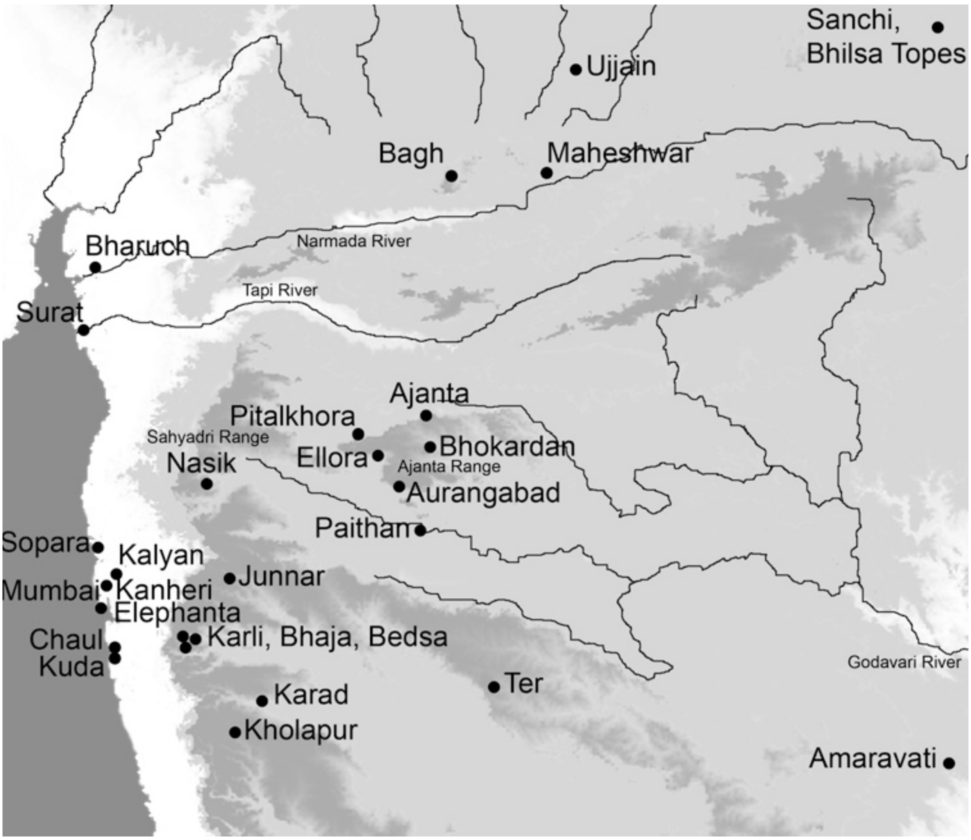


Figure 2. Map of the Deccan Plateau with location of cave sites.

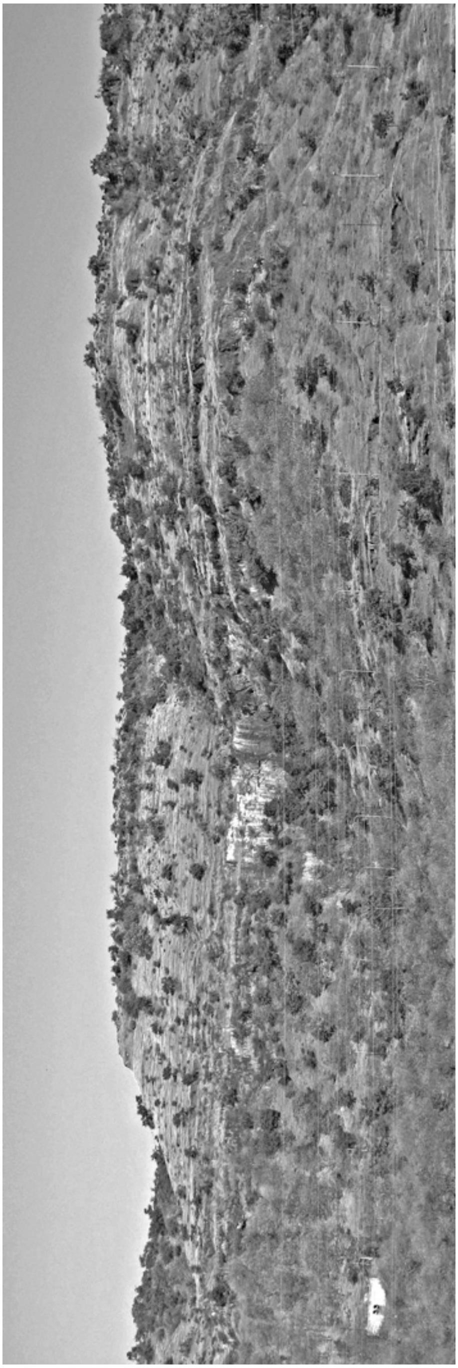


Figure 3. Aurangabad, view of the hill where caves are excavated.

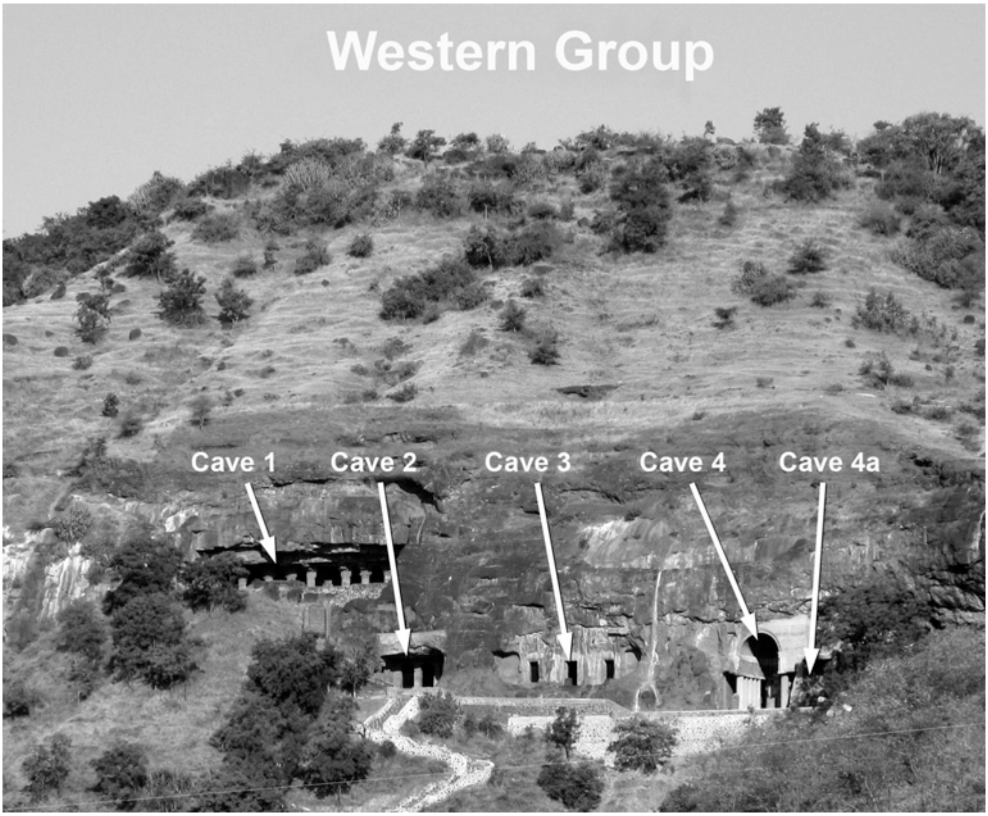


Figure 4. Aurangabad caves, Western Group.

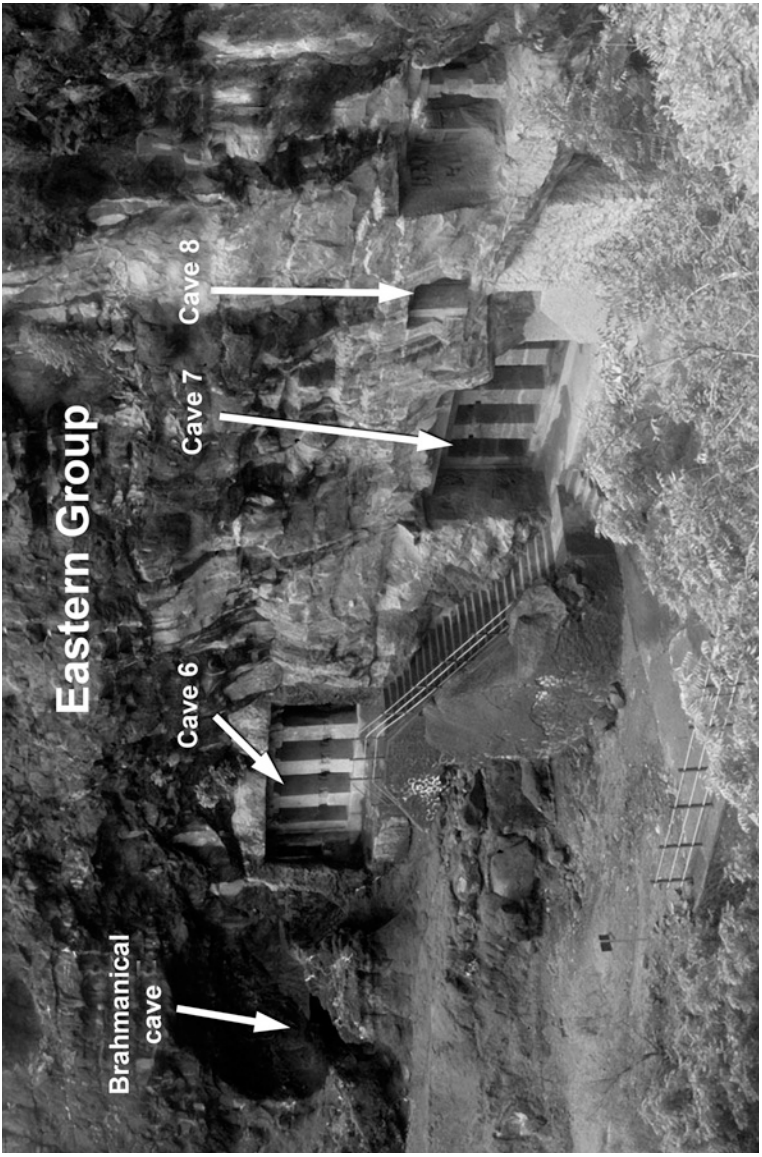


Figure 5. Aurangabad caves, Eastern Group viewed from cave 9.

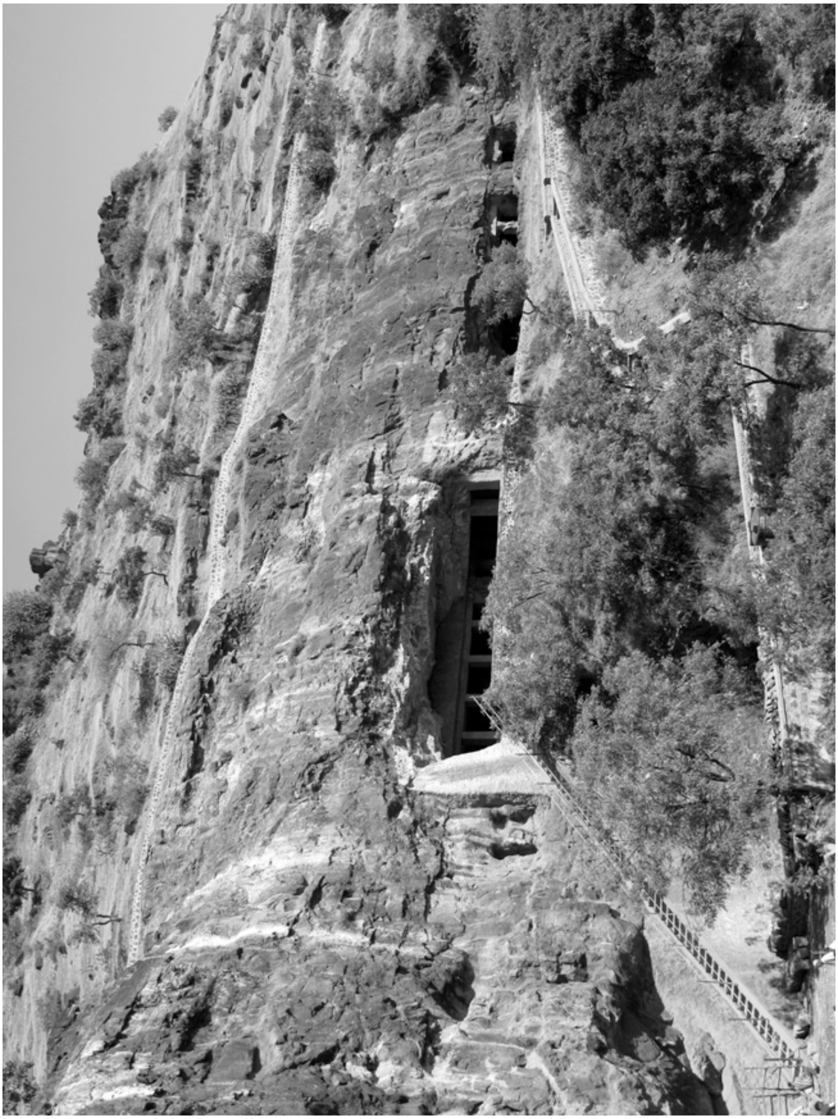


Figure 6. Aurangabad caves, Eastern Group, cave 9 with adjacent unfinished excavations.

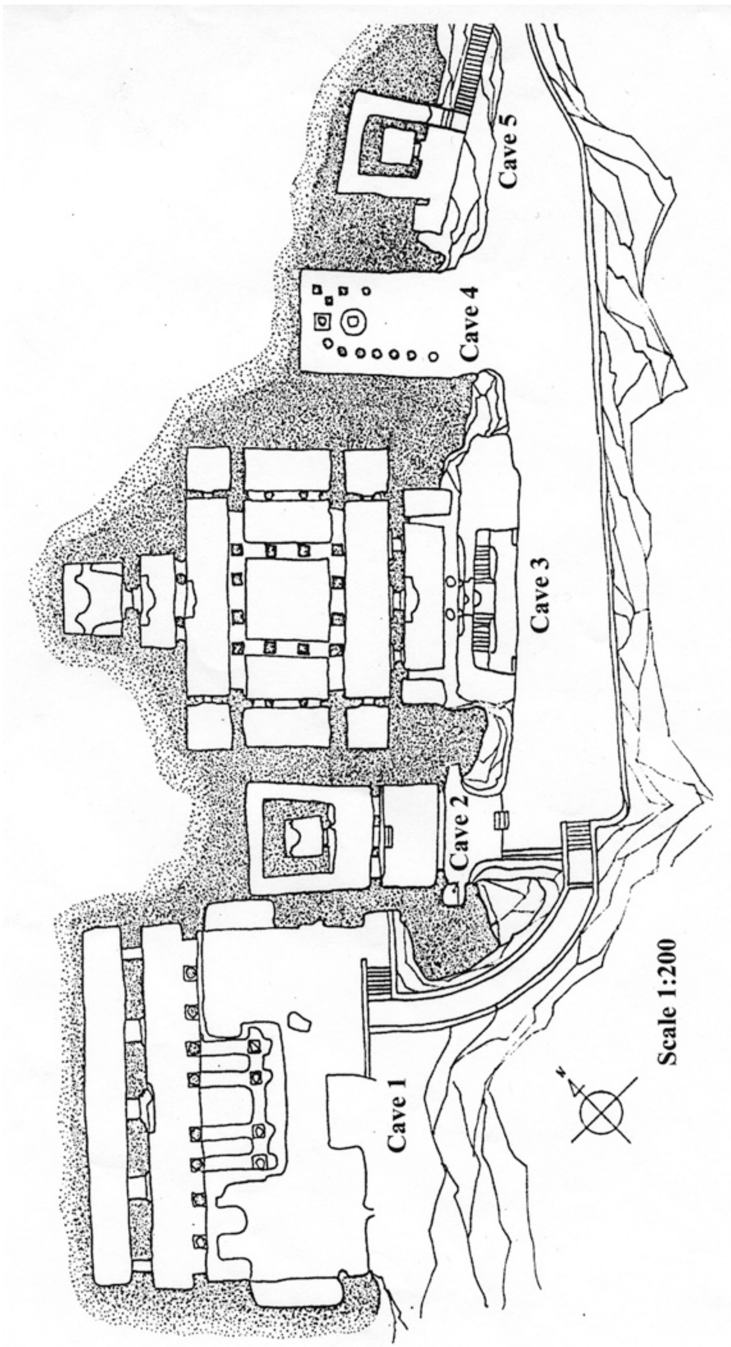


Figure 7. Aurangabad caves, plan of the Western Group.

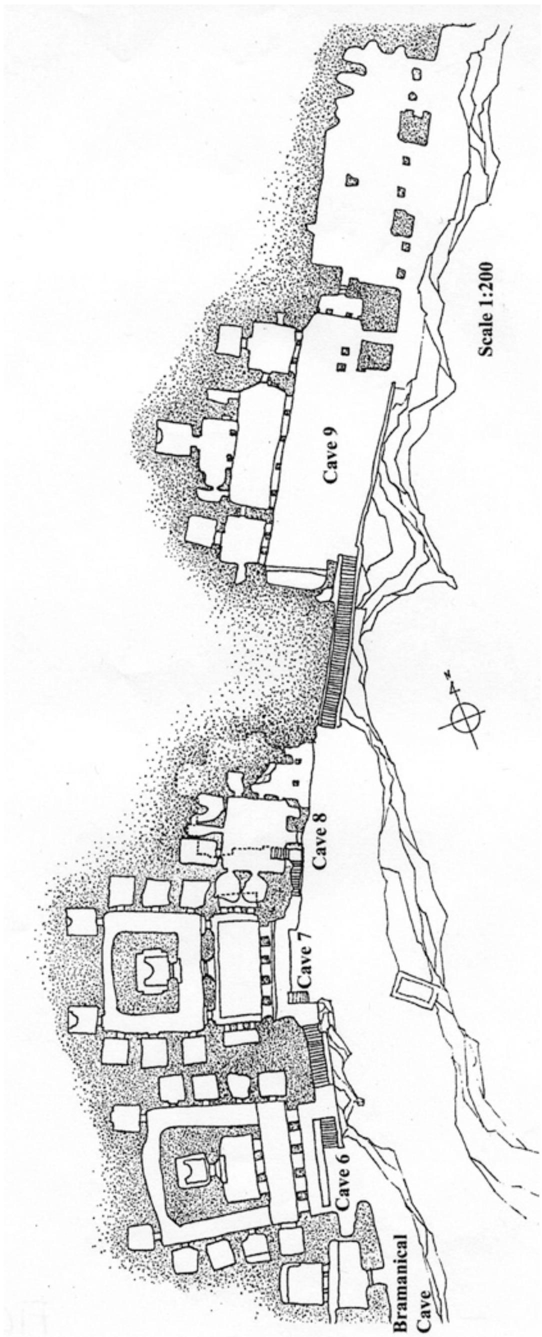


Figure 8. Aurangabad caves, plan of the Eastern Group.

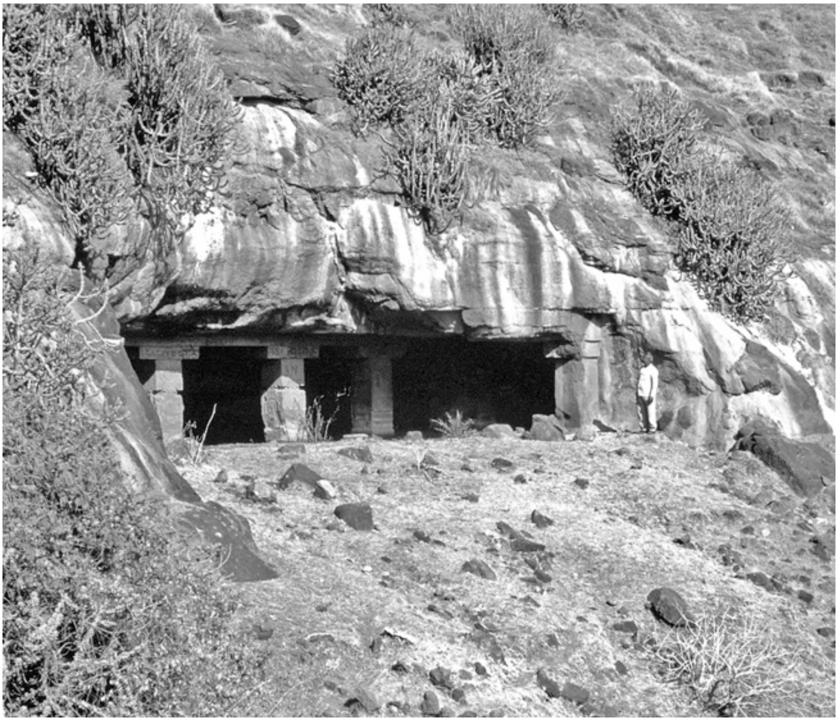


Figure 9. Aurangabad, unfinished cave, Northern Group.

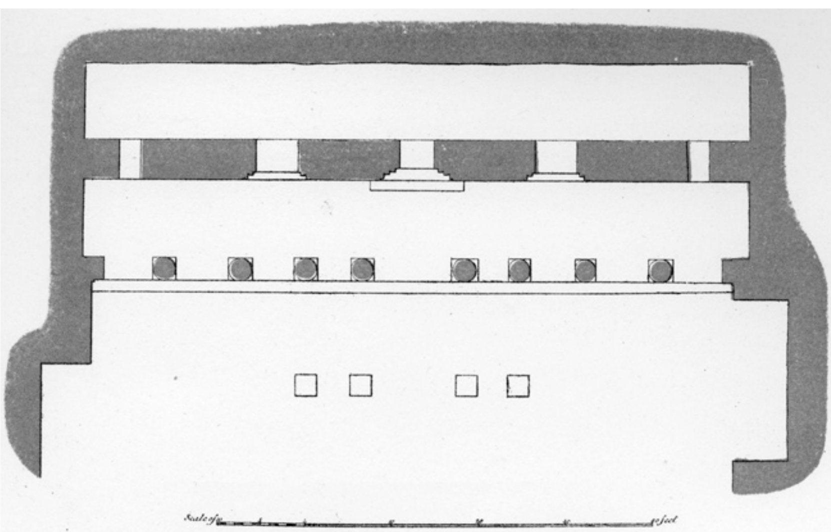


Figure 10. Aurangabad, plan of cave 1 (Burgess 1878).

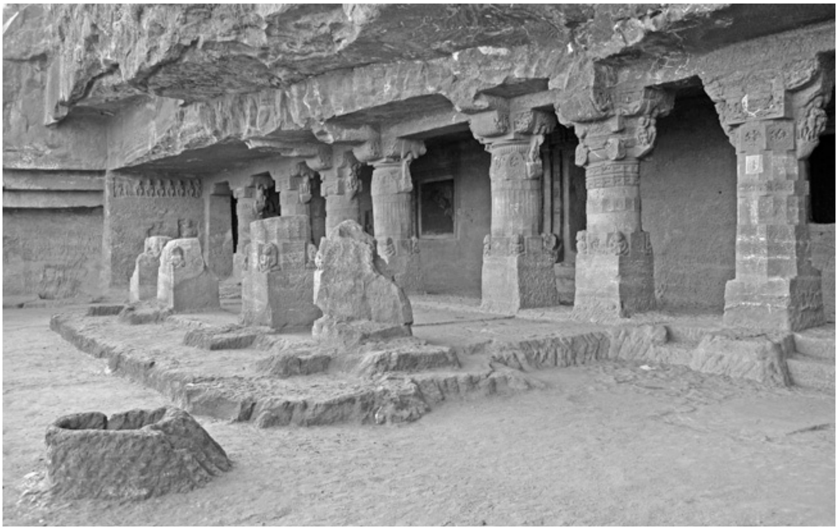


Figure 11. Aurangabad cave no. 1, view of the porch and area in front of the cave.

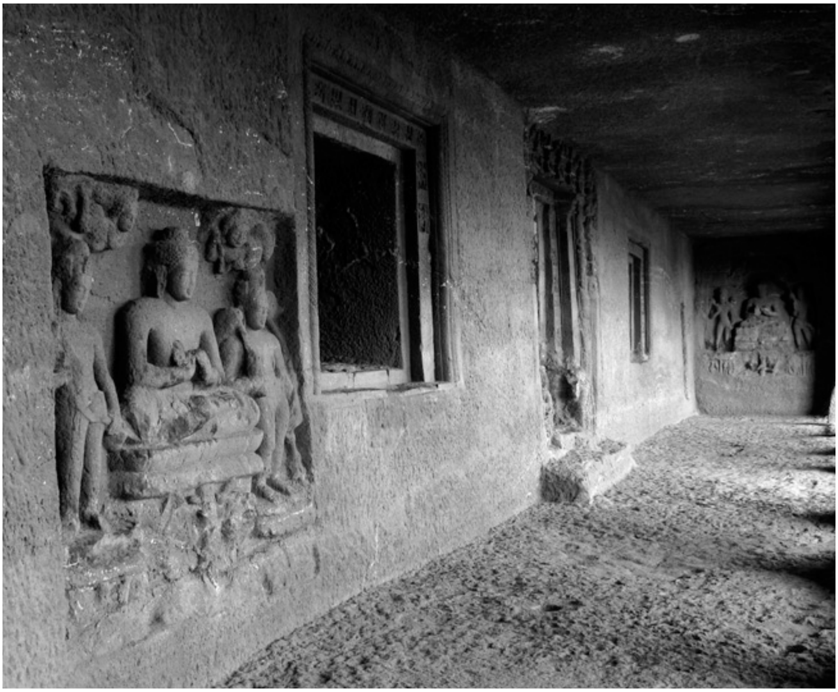


Figure 12. Aurangabad cave no. 1, façade.



Figure 13. Aurangabad cave no. 1, unfinished interior.

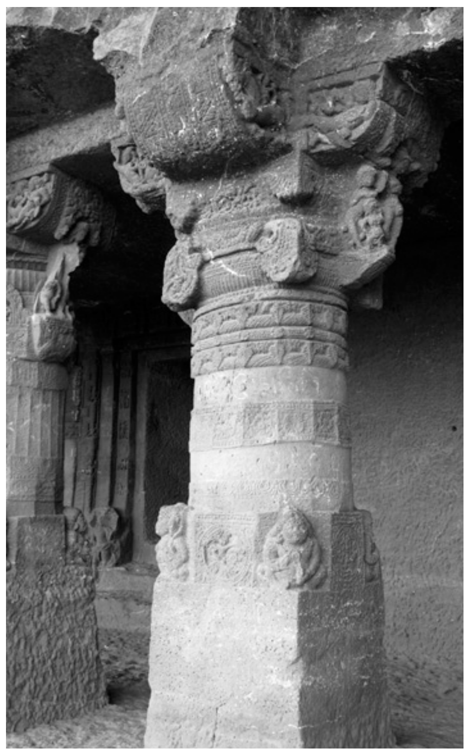


Figure 14. Aurangabad cave no. 1, porch pillar.



Figure 15. Aurangabad cave no. 1, porch pillar, detail of figural bracket.

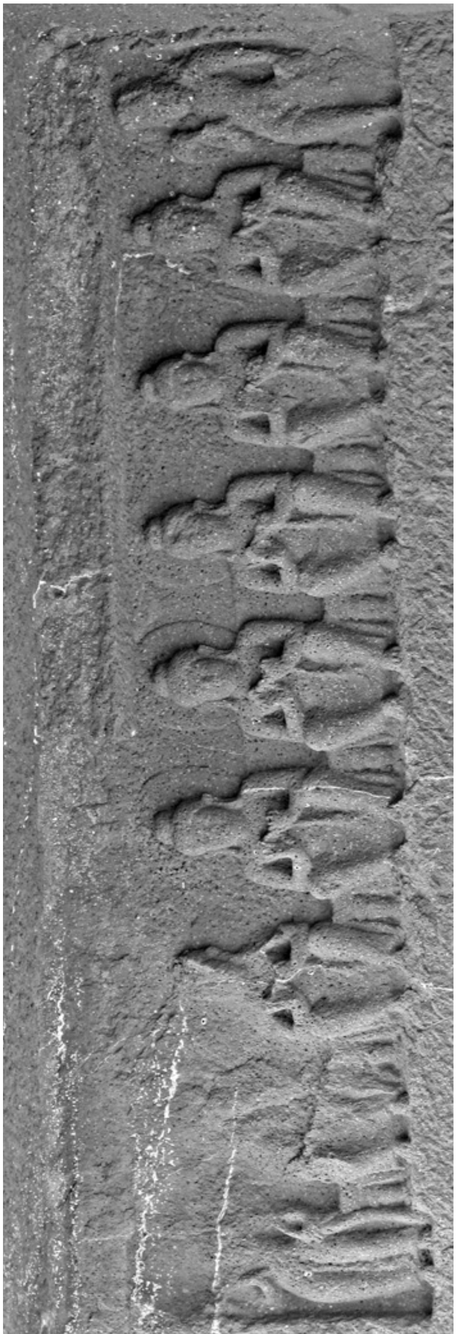


Figure 16. Aurangabad cave no. 1, porch, left, votive carving depicting *bhadrāsana* Buddhas.

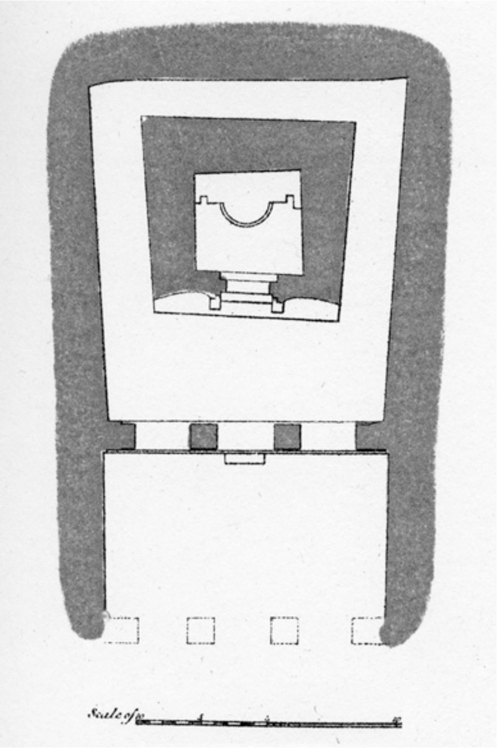


Figure 17. Aurangabad cave no. 2, plan (Burgess 1878).

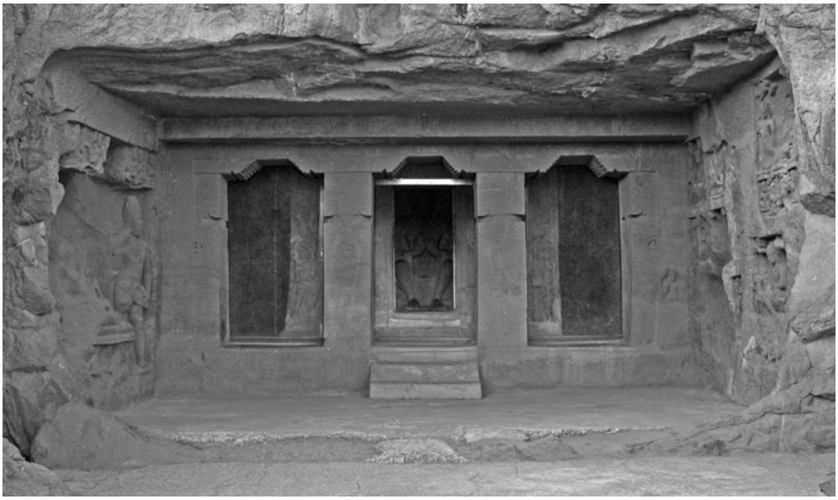


Figure 18. Aurangabad cave no. 2, façade.

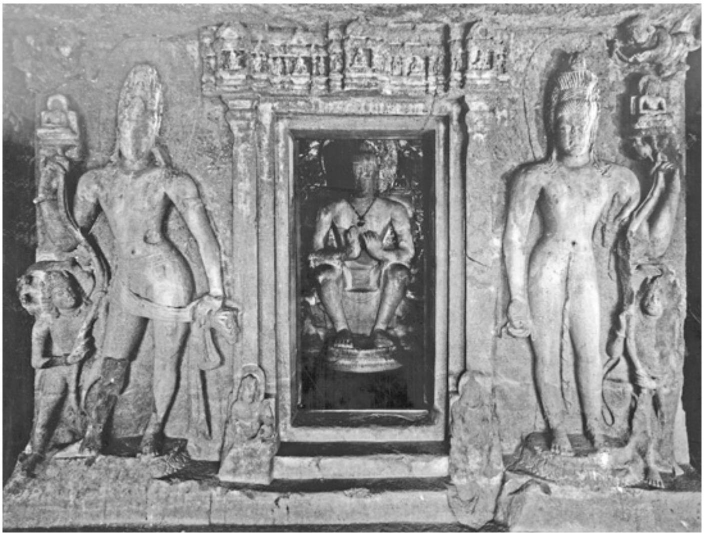


Figure 19. Aurangabad cave no. 2, interior, *bodhisattvas* flanking the shrine entrance. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.



Figure 20. Aurangabad cave no. 2, interior, *bodhisattva* to the left of the shrine entrance. Courtesy of the University of Michigan, American Committee for Southern Asian Art Archive.

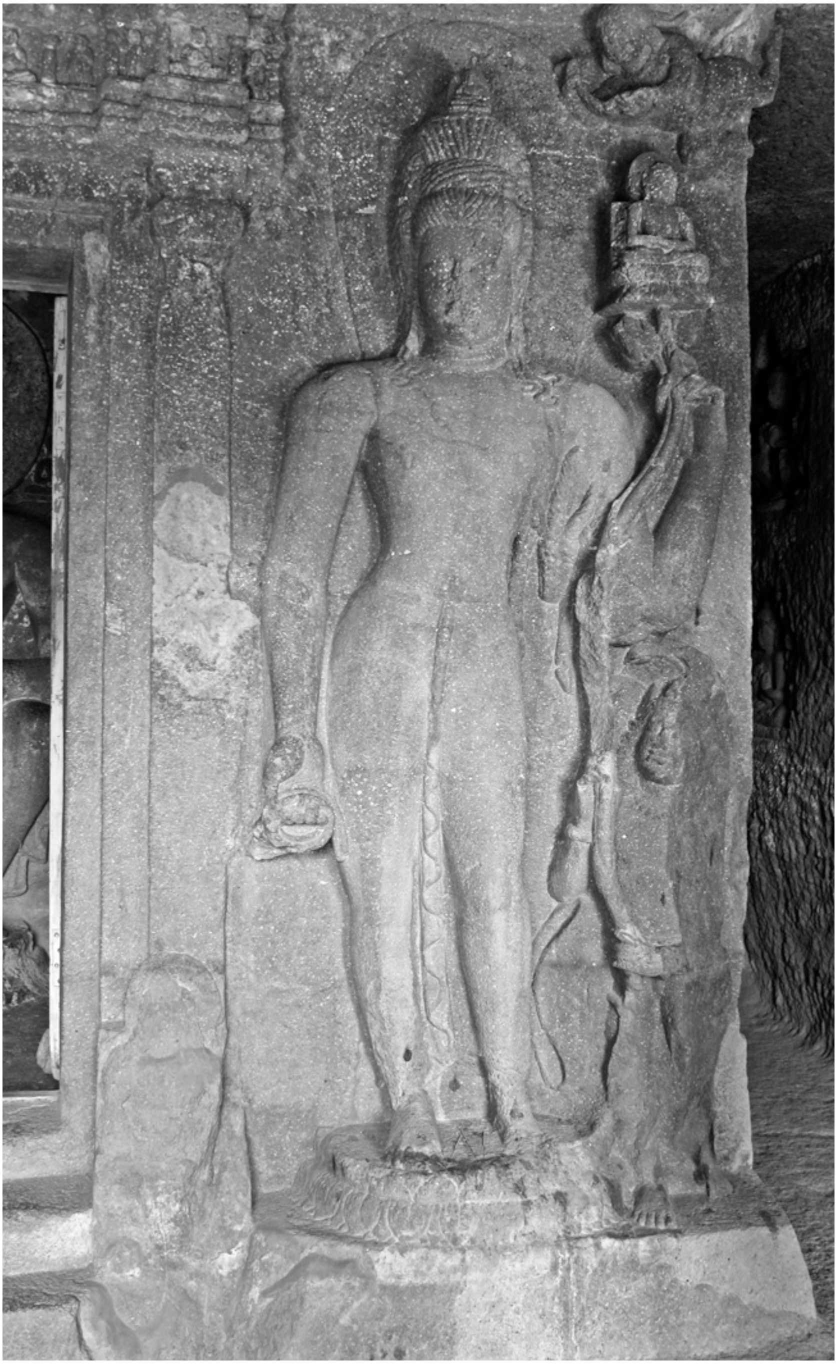


Figure 21. Aurangabad cave no. 2, interior, *bodhisattva* to the right of the shrine entrance.



Figure 22. Aurangabad cave no. 2, exterior, left wall, large votive panel with Vajrapāṇi.

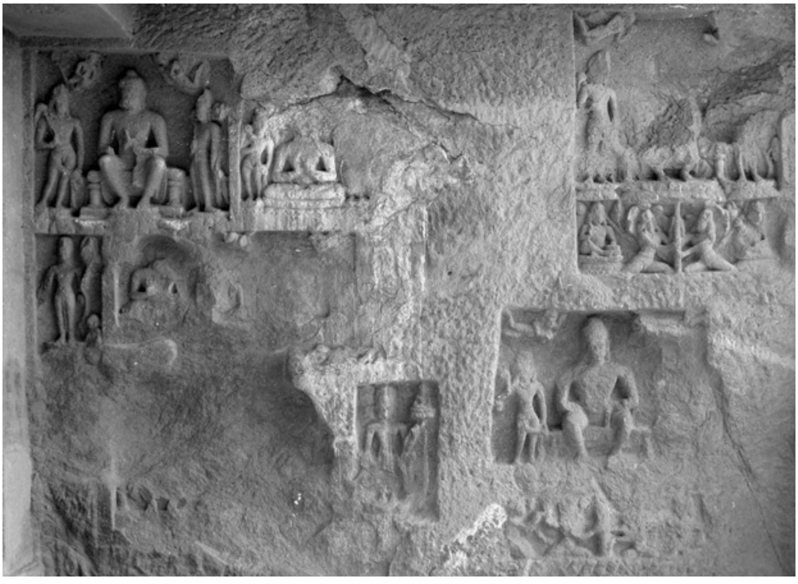


Figure 23. Aurangabad cave no. 2, exterior, right wall, votive panels.



Figure 24. Aurangabad cave no. 2, interior, corridor with votive panels to the left of the shrine.

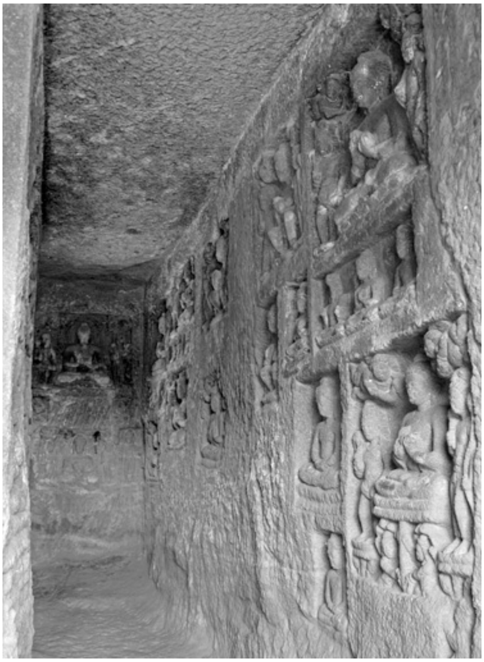


Figure 25. Aurangabad cave no. 2, interior, corridor with votive panels to the right of the shrine.

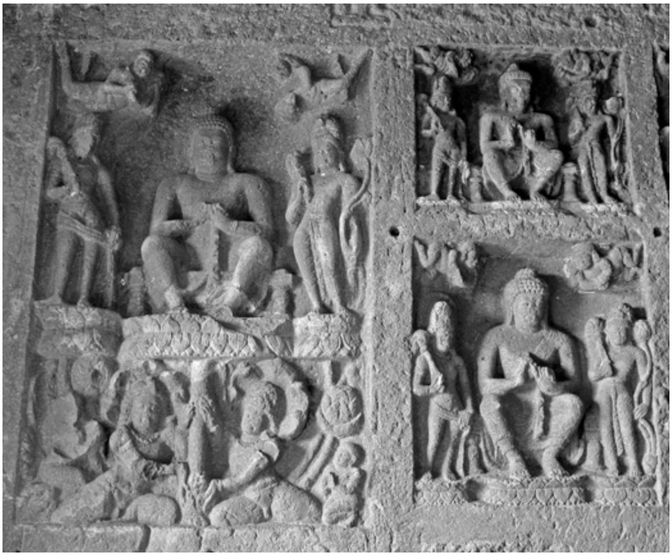


Figure 26. Aurangabad cave no. 2, interior, left wall, votive panels.



Figure 27. Aurangabad cave no. 2, interior, left wall, votive panel with squatting female.



Figure 28. Aurangabad cave no. 2, interior, detail of squatting female.



Figure 29. Aurangabad cave no. 2, interior, right ambulatory path, left wall, votive panel, bottom left, detail of painted inscription now obliterated.

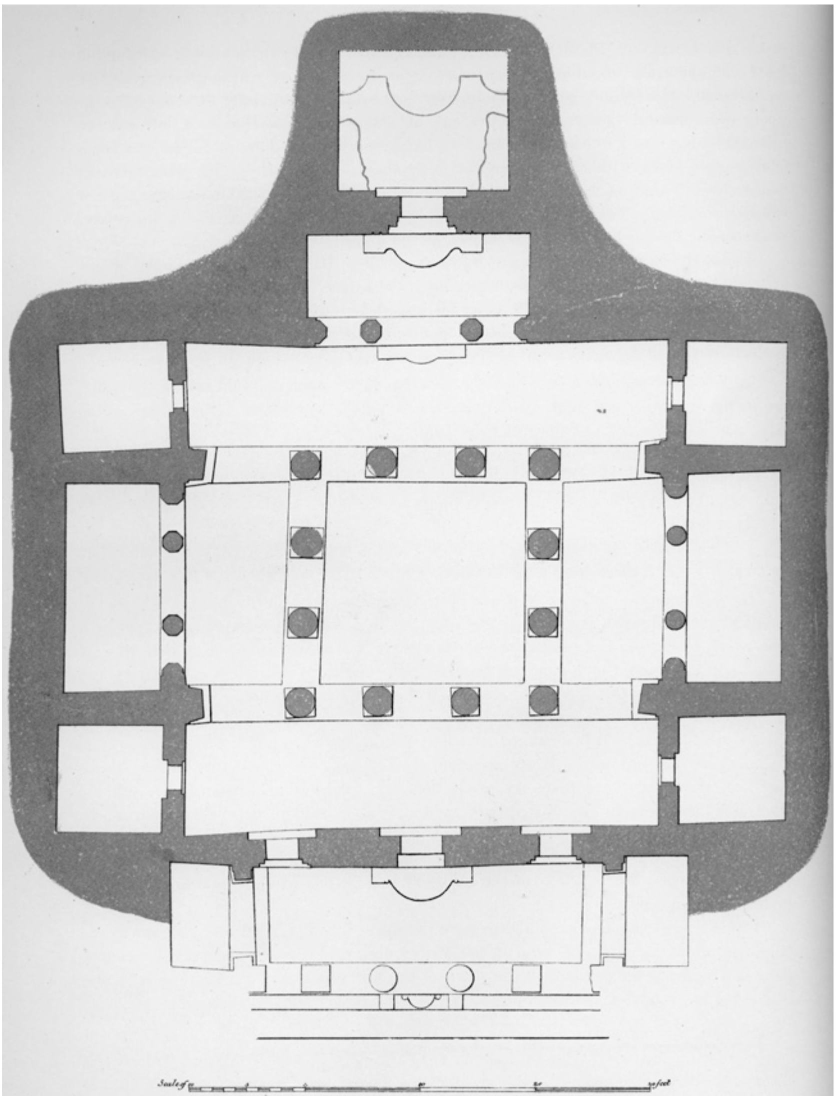


Figure 30. Aurangabad cave no. 3, plan (Burgess 1878).

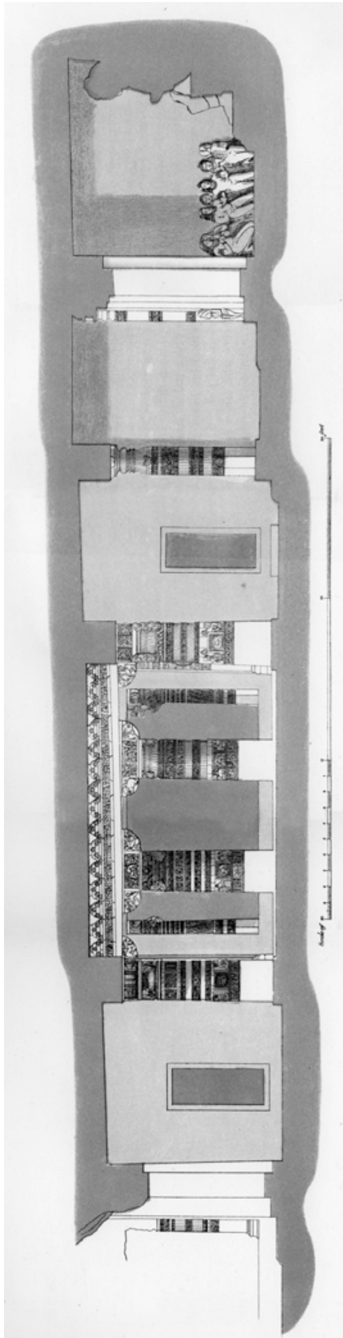


Figure 31. Aurangabad cave no. 3, section (Burgess 1878).



Figure 32. Aurangabad cave no. 3, façade.

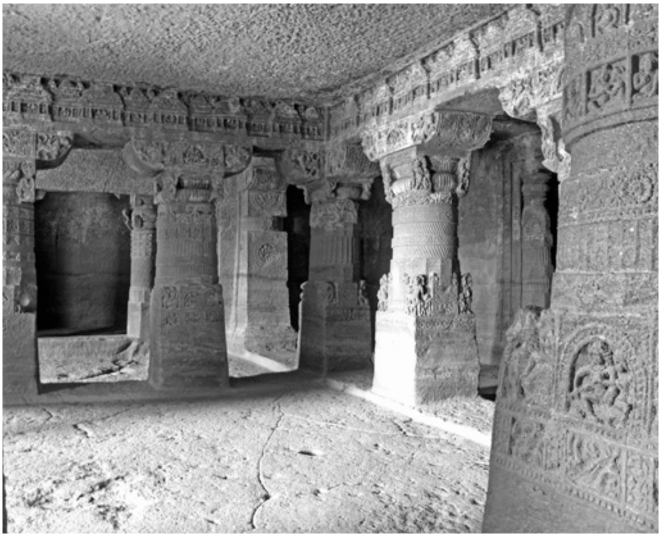


Figure 33. Aurangabad cave no. 3, view of the interior hall.



Figure 34. Aurangabad cave no. 3, interior, decorated pillar.



Figure 35. Aurangabad cave no. 3, interior, left chapel.



Figure 36. Aurangabad cave no. 3, interior, antechamber to the shrine.



Figure 37. Aurangabad cave no. 3, shrine interior, main Buddha in *bhadrāsana* flanked by *bodhisattvas* and kneeling devotees. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.



Figure 38. Aurangabad cave no. 3, shrine interior, kneeling devotees by the left wall.



Figure 39. Aurangabad cave no. 3, shrine interior, kneeling devotees by the right wall.



Figure 40. Aurangabad cave no. 3, shrine interior, detail of leading figure among kneeling devotees.

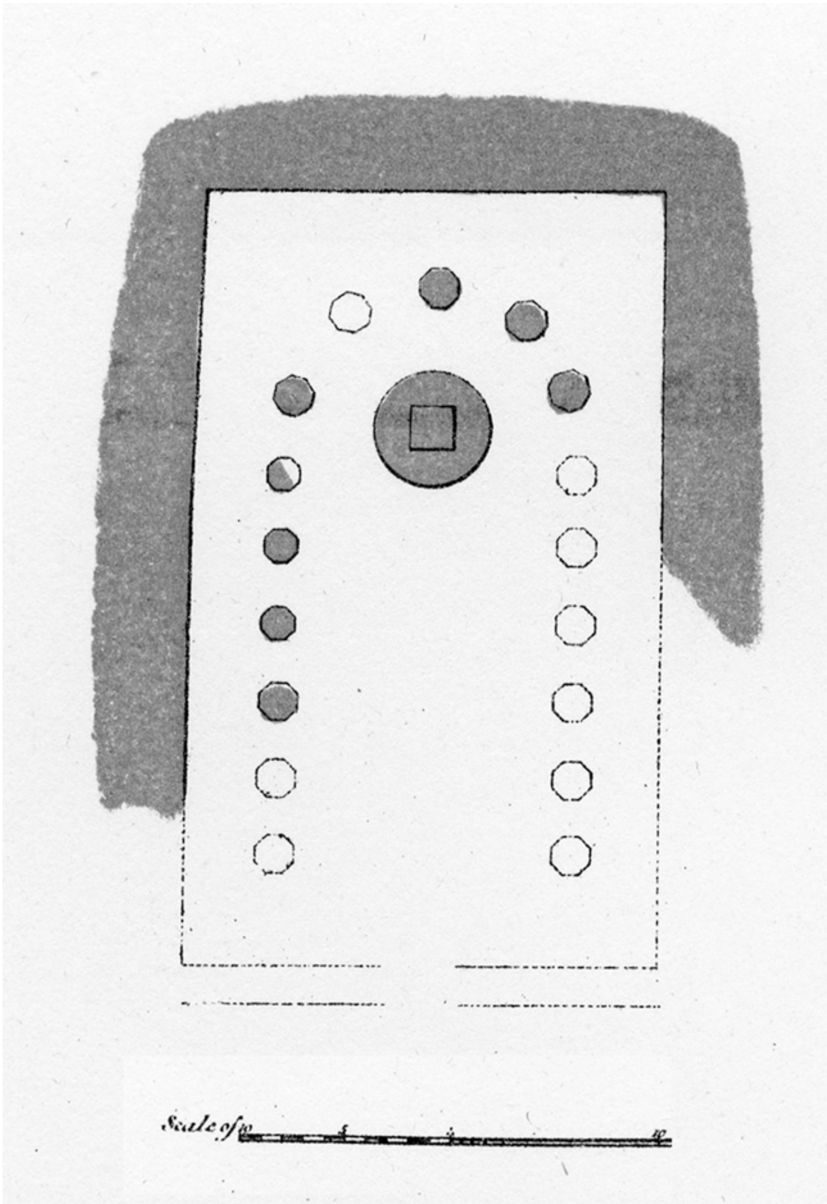


Figure 41. Aurangabad *caitya* cave no. 4, plan (Burgess 1878).



Figure 42. Aurangabad *caitya* cave no. 4.



Figure 43. Aurangabad *caitya* cave no. 4, interior, detail of the vault.



Figure 44. Aurangabad view of caves no. 4a and 5 before most recent conservation.



Figure 45. Aurangabad cave no. 4a before most recent conservation.

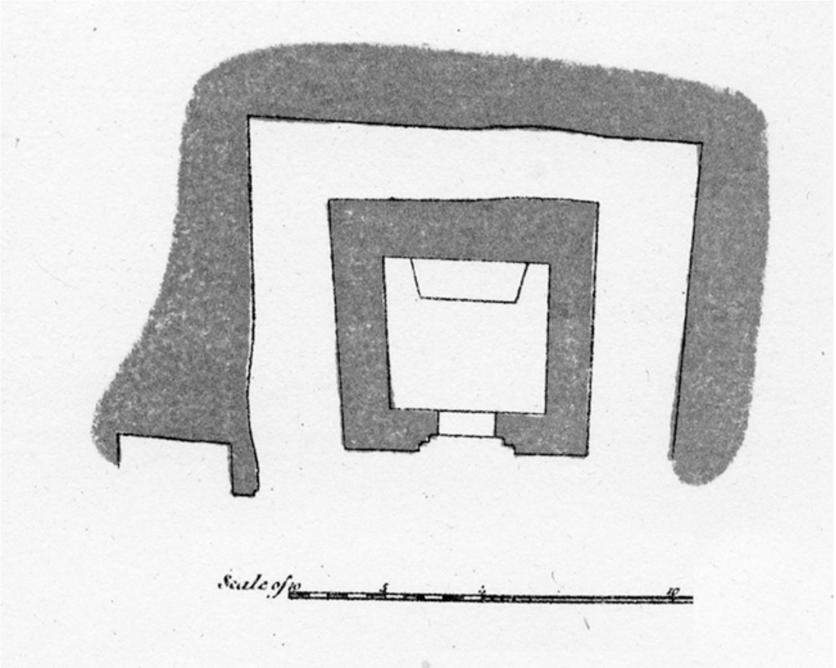


Figure 46. Aurangabad cave no. 5, plan (Burgess 1878).

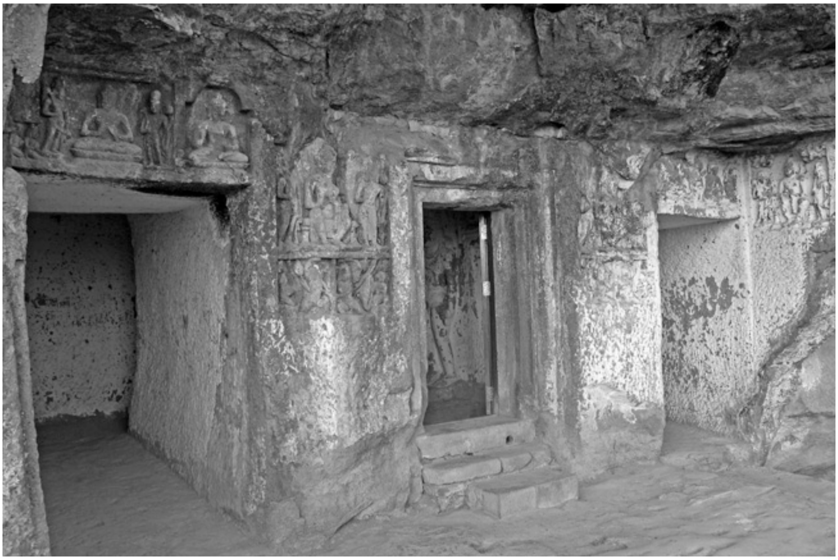


Figure 47. Aurangabad cave no. 5.



Figure 48. Aurangabad cave no. 5, shrine interior, main Buddha in *padmāsana* flanked by *bodhisattvas.*



Figure 49. Aurangabad, area of collapse adjacent to cave 4a and 5, possible location of the early *vihāra.*



Figure 50. Aurangabad, so-called brahmanical cave, interior, left wall, Śiva with the *Saptamātṛkās*.



Figure 51. Auranagabad, so-called brahmanical cave, interior, left wall, detail of Śiva Vīrabhadra.



Figure 52. Aurangabad, so-called brahmanical cave, interior, back wall, from the left: Cāmuṇḍā, Gaṇeśa and Durgā.



Figure 53. Aurangabad, so-called brahmanical cave, interior, right wall, *dhyānāsana* Buddhas.

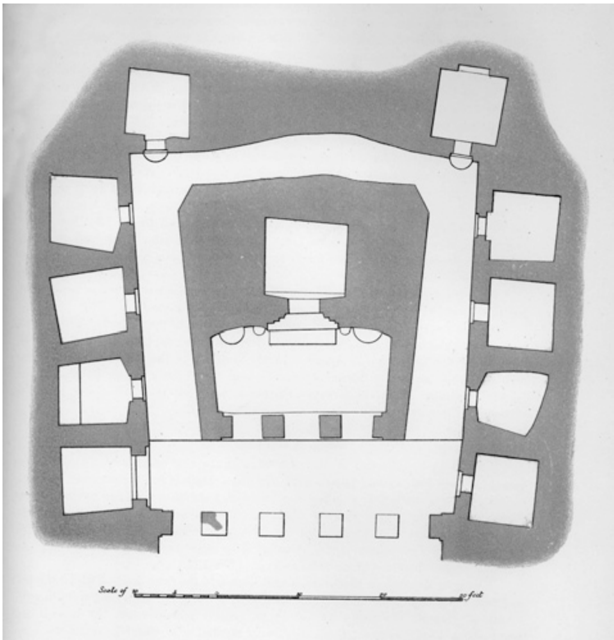


Figure 54. Aurangabad cave no. 6, plan (Burgess 1878).

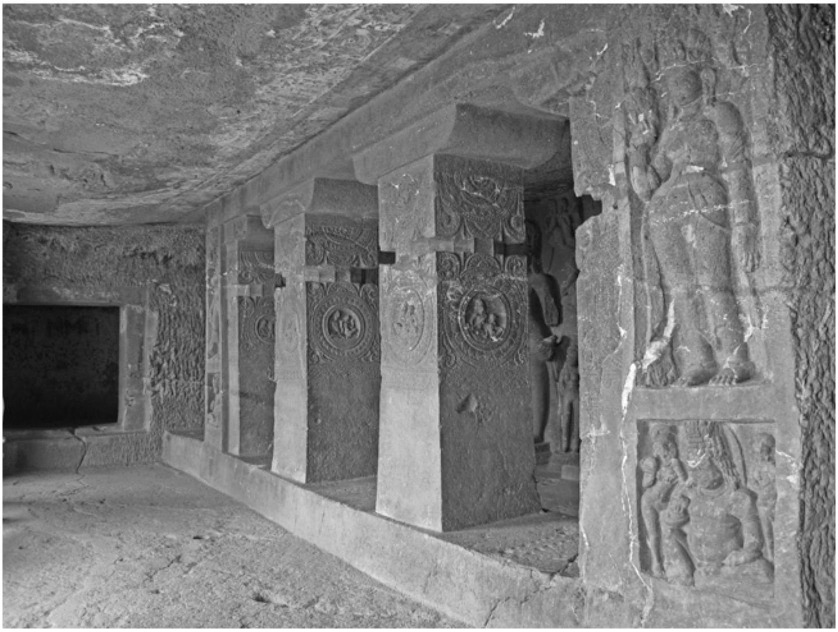


Figure 55. Aurangabad cave no. 6, porch.

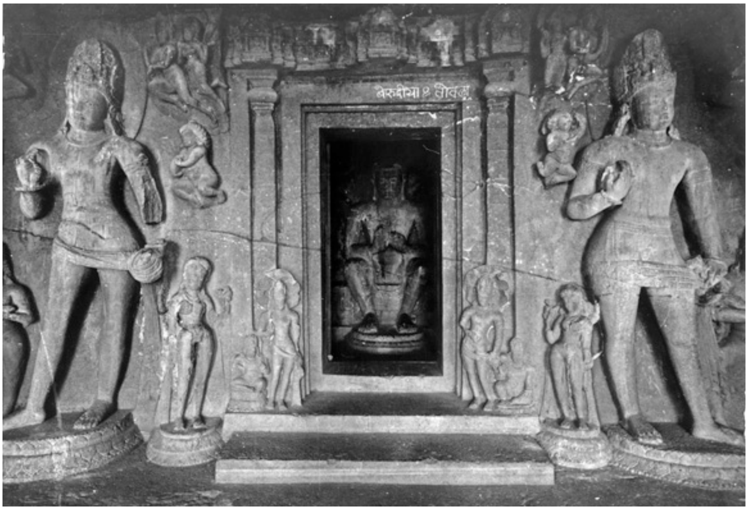


Figure 56. Aurangabad cave no. 6, interior, *bodhisattvas* flanking the entrance to the shrine.

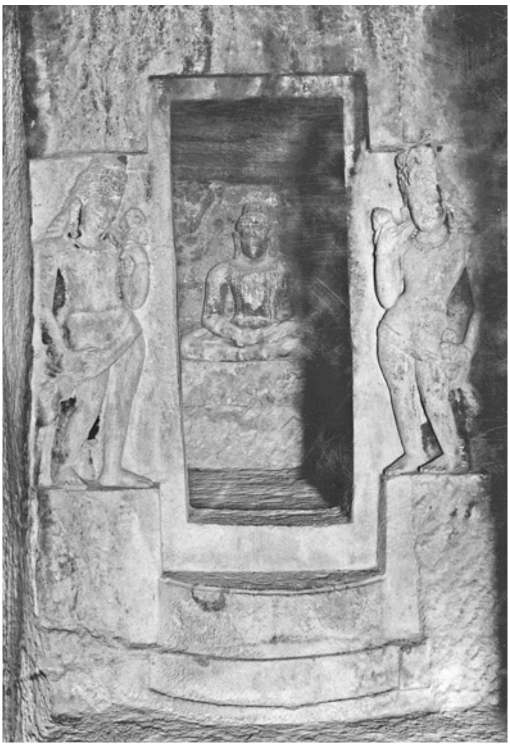


Figure 57. Aurangabad cave no. 6, interior, corridor to the left of the main shrine, cell transformed into subsidiary shrine.

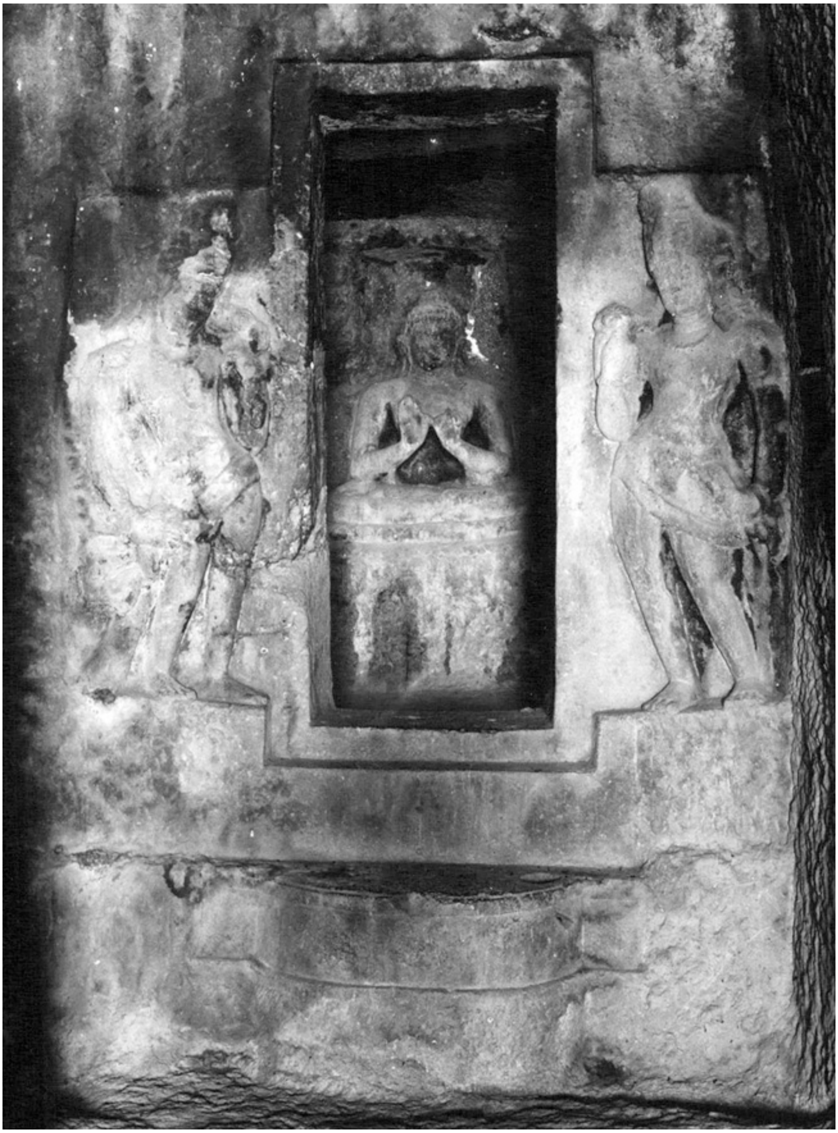


Figure 58. Aurangabad cave no. 6, interior, corridor to the right of the main shrine, cell transformed into subsidiary shrine.



Figure 59. Aurangabad cave no. 6, interior, *bodhisattva* to the left of shrine entrance.



Figure 60. Aurangabad cave no. 6, interior, *bodhisattva* Vajrapāṇi to the right of shrine entrance.

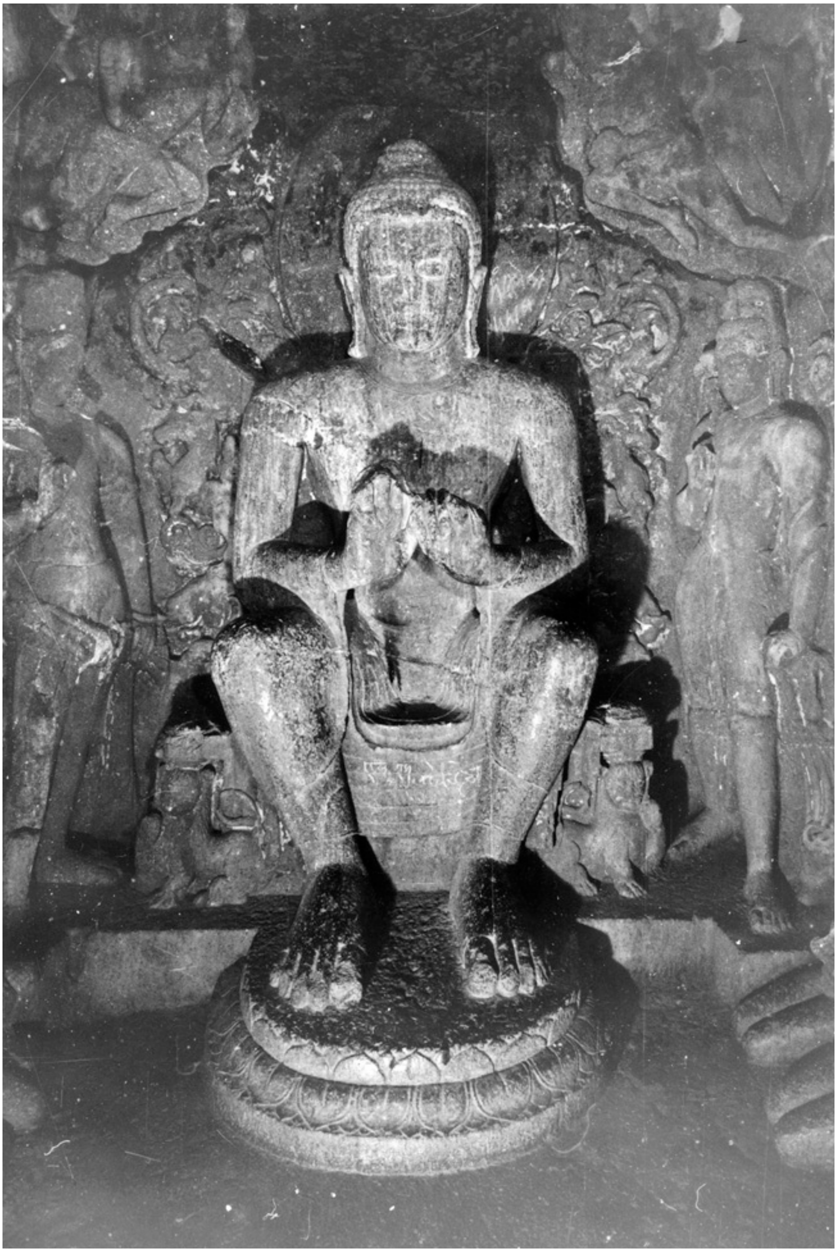


Figure 61. Aurangabad cave no. 6, shrine interior, main Buddha in *bhadrāsana* flanked by *bodhisattvas*. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

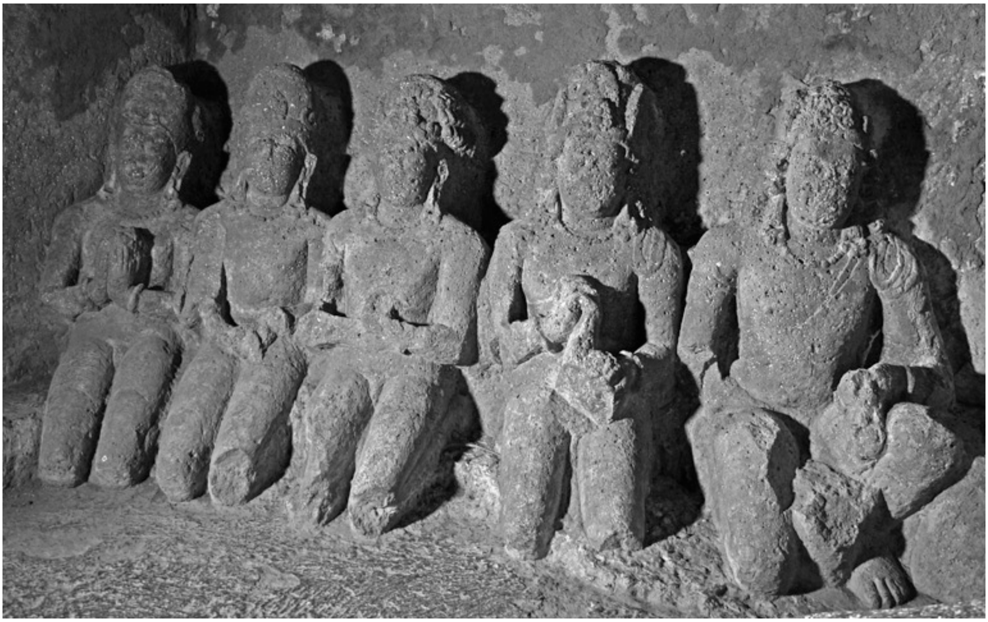


Figure 62. Aurangabad cave no. 6, shrine interior, kneeling devotees by the left wall.



Figure 63. Aurangabad cave no. 6, shrine interior, kneeling devotees by the right wall.

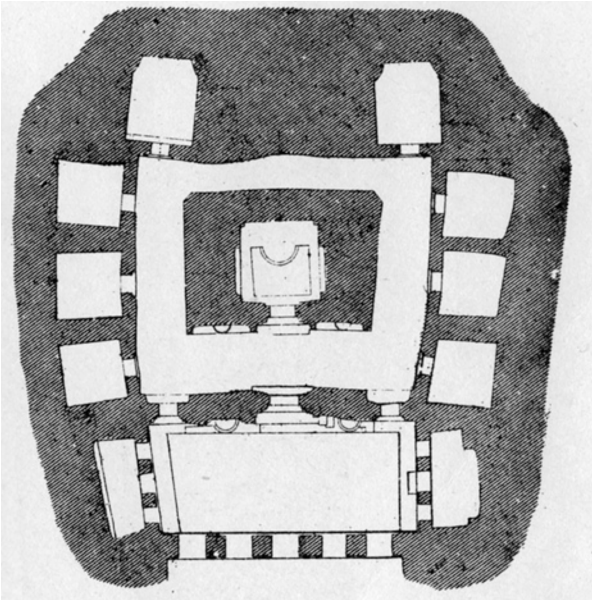


Figure 64. Aurangabad cave 7, plan (Burgess 1878).

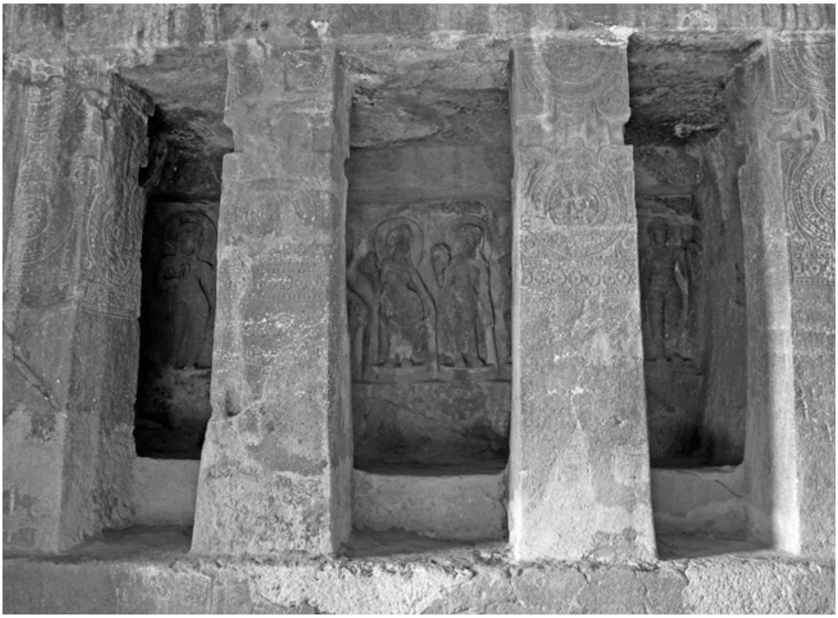


Figure 65. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, left chapel with six *Vidyārājñīs* flanked by Avalokiteśvara and standing Buddha.

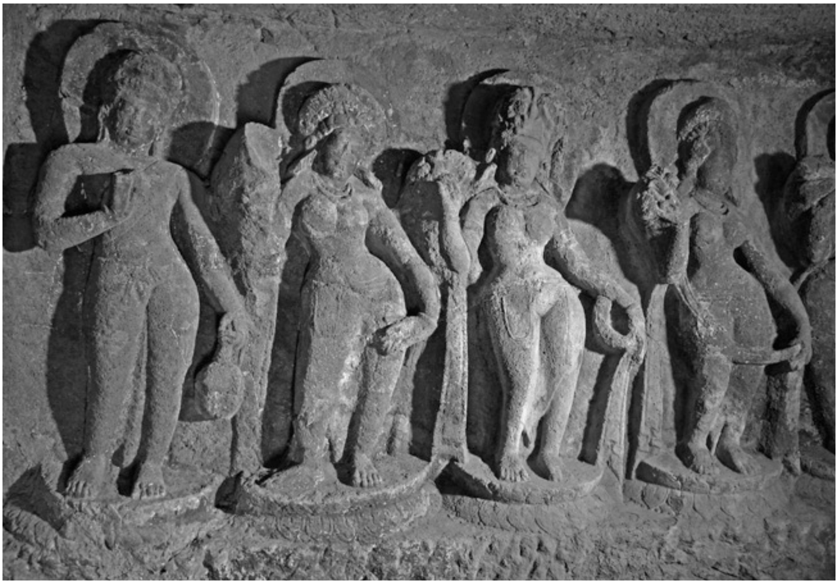


Figure 66. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, left chapel, detail from left: Avalokiteśvara and *Vidyārājñīs*.

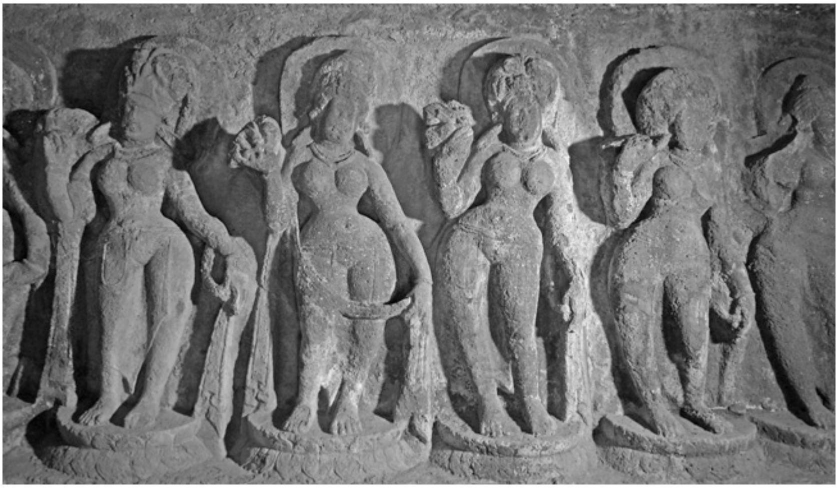


Figure 67. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, left chapel, detail: *Vidyārājñīs* in the middle of the row.



Figure 68. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, left chapel, detail from right: *Vidyārājñīs* and standing Buddha in *varādamudrā*.



Figure 69. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, right chapel, Jambhala-Kubera and Hāritī.

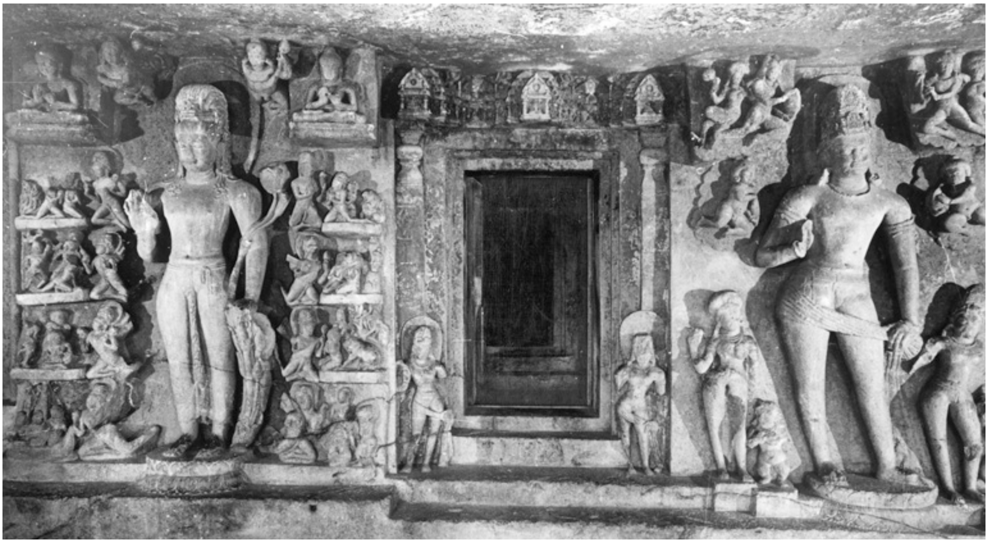


Figure 70. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, *bodhisattvas* flanking the entrance to the cave.



Figure 71. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara to the left of cave entrance.



Figure 72. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara, detail of the shipwreck.



Figure 73. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara, detail of the fetters and chains.



Figure 74. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara, detail of the brigands.



Figure 75. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara, detail of the fire.



Figure 76. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara, detail of the lion.



Figure 77. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara, detail of the snakes.



Figure 78. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara, detail of the wild elephant.



Figure 79. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara, detail of the magic spell.

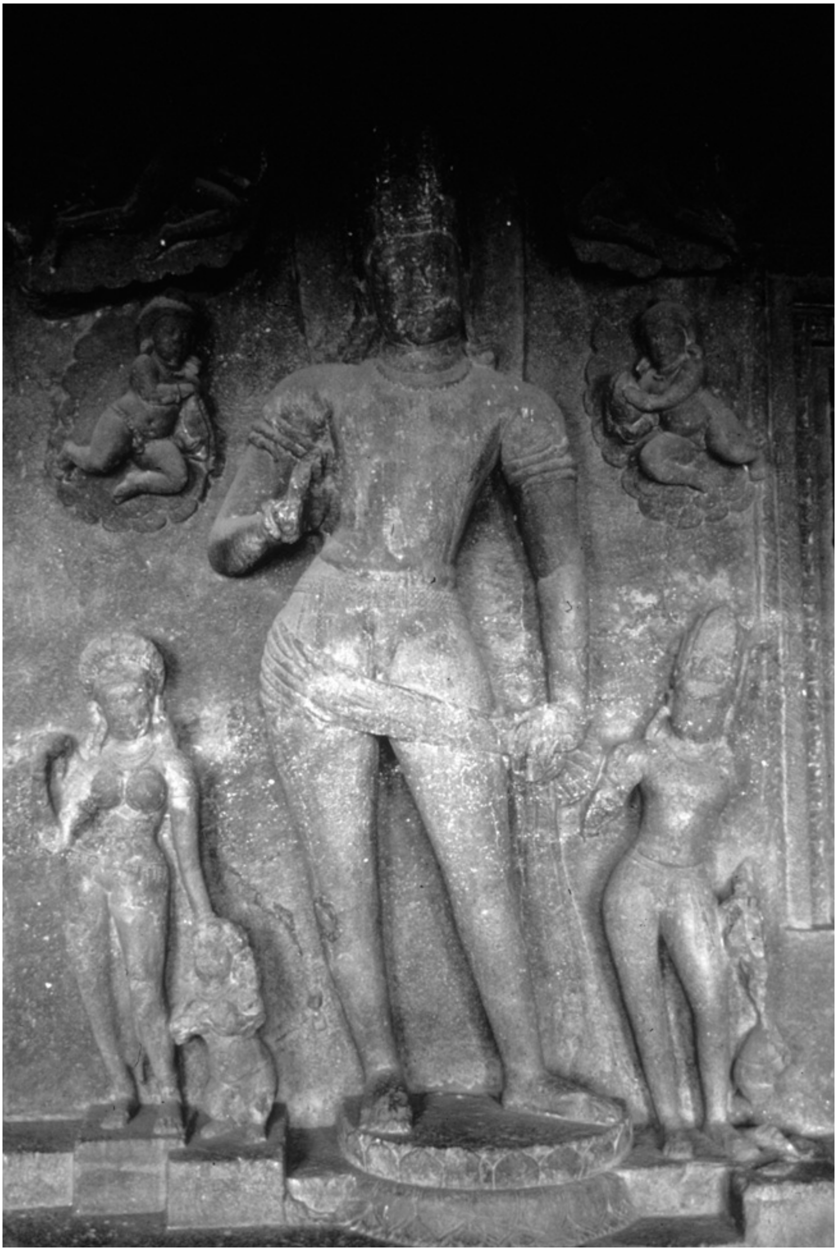


Figure 80. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, *bodhisattva* to the right of cave entrance in pair with *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara.



Figure 81. Aurangabad cave no. 7, porch, Gaja Lakṣmī over left window.

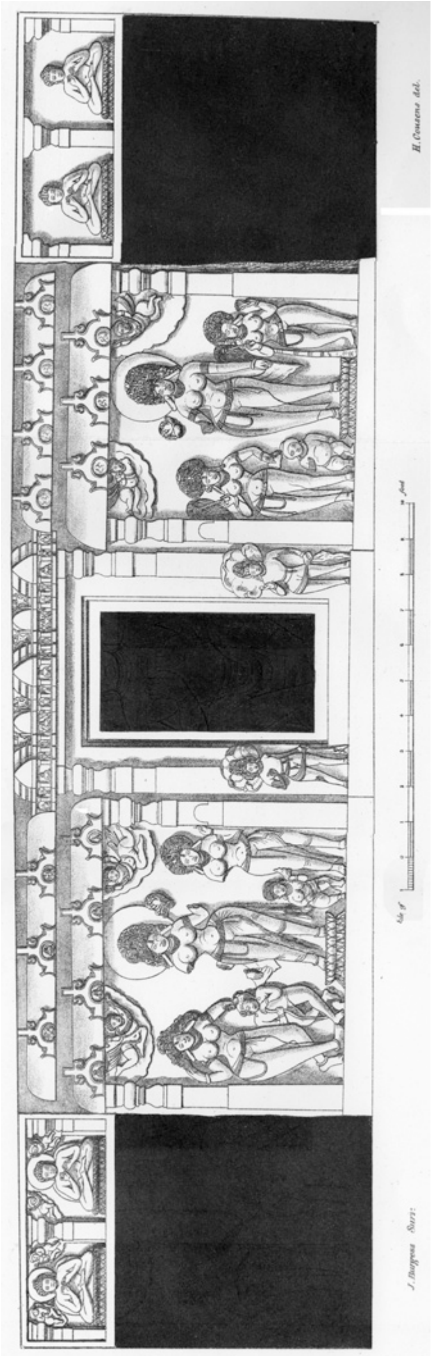


Figure 82. Aurangabad cave no. 7, drawing of the interior, shrine antechamber, groups of female deities flanking the shrine entrance (Burgess 1878).

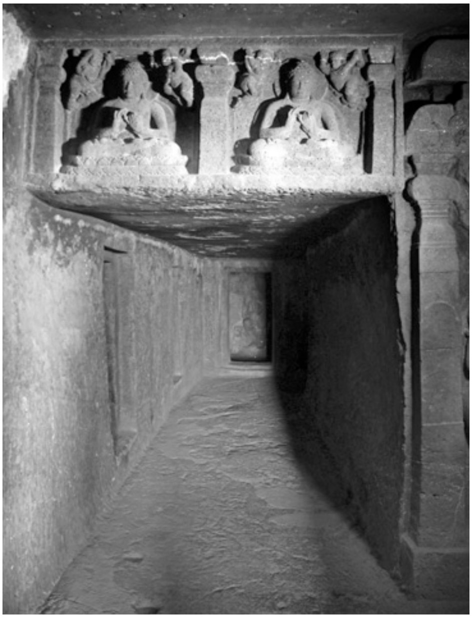


Figure 83. Aurangabad cave no. 7, interior, corridor to the left of the shrine.

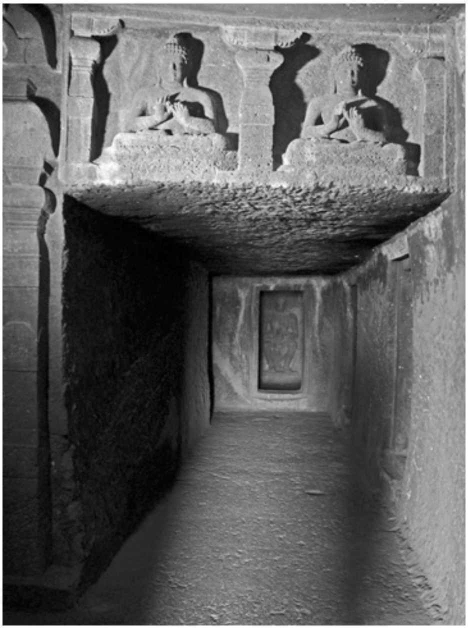


Figure 84. Aurangabad cave no. 7, interior, corridor to the right of the shrine.



Figure 85. Aurangabad cave no. 7, interior, shrine antechamber, group of female deities to the left of the shrine entrance.

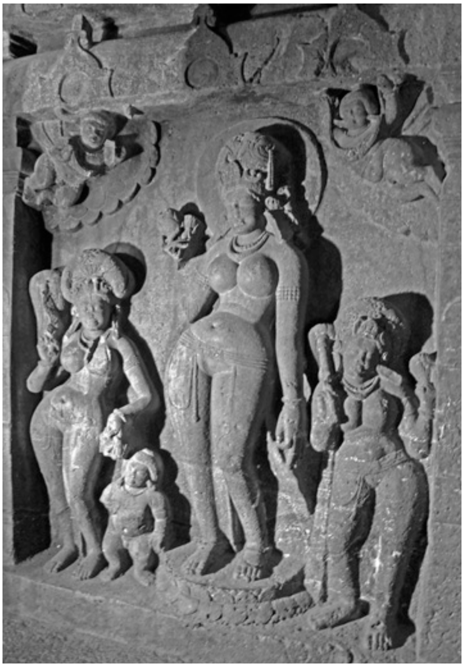


Figure 86. Aurangabad cave no. 7, interior, shrine antechamber, group of female deities to the right of the shrine entrance.

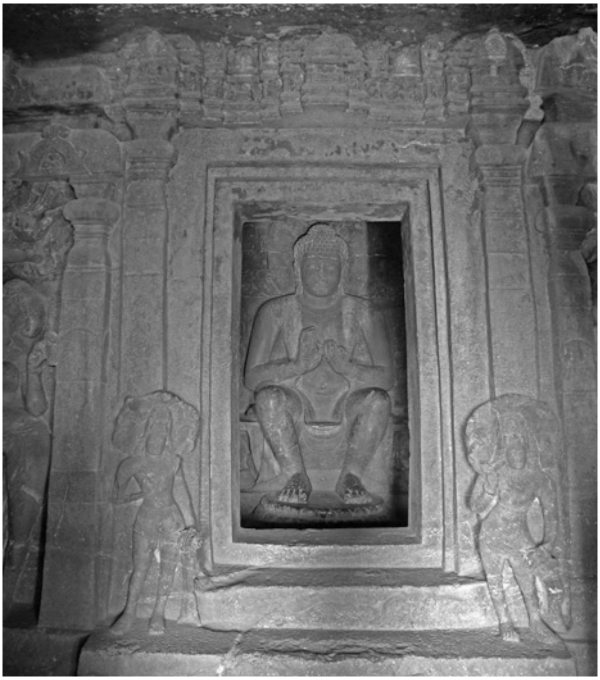


Figure 87. Aurangabad cave no. 7, interior, shrine entrance and main *bhadrāsana* Buddha.



Figure 88. Aurangabad cave no. 7, interior, shrine, left wall, dancing deity with musicians.



Figure 89. Aurangabad cave no. 7, interior, shrine, right wall, Avalokiteśvara and Tārā.

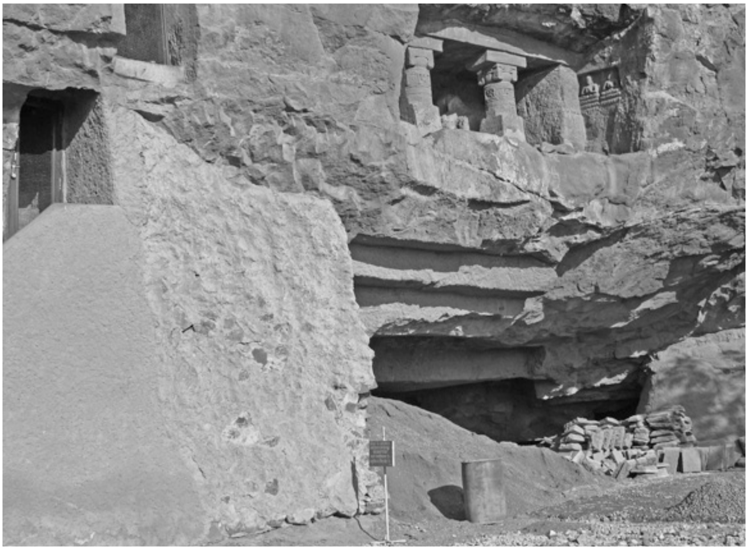


Figure 90. Aurangabad, Western group, area beneath cave 8.

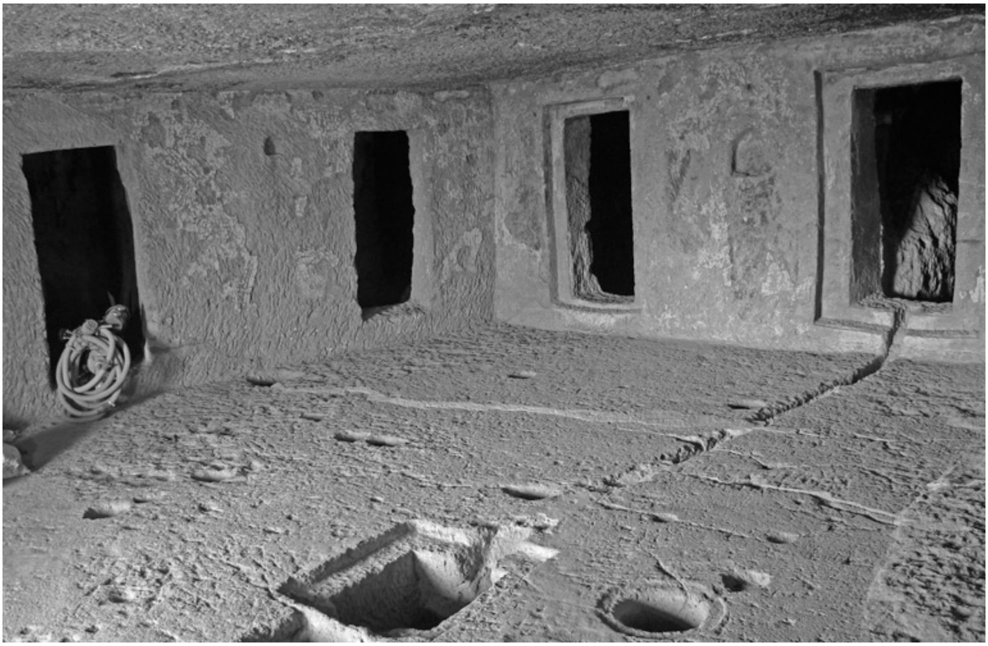


Figure 91. Aurangabad cave 8, interior.

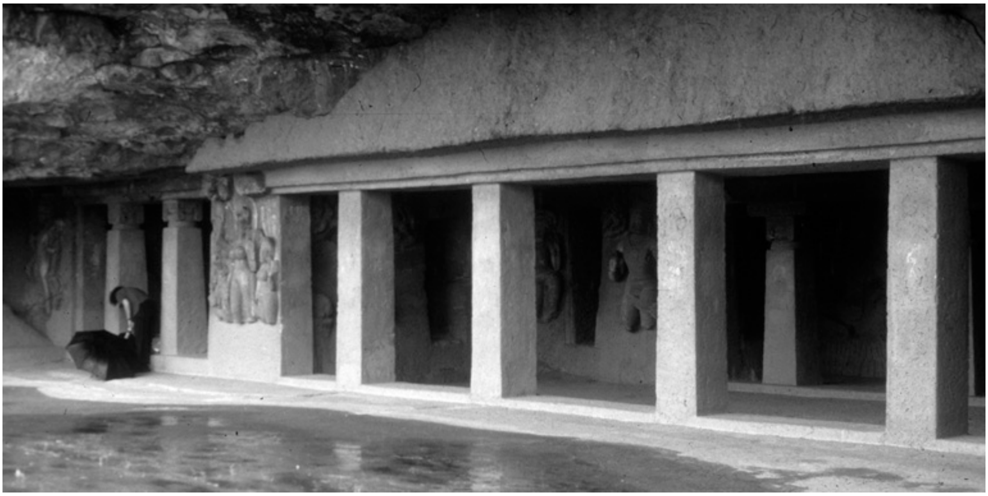


Figure 92. Aurangabad cave no. 9, porch.



Figure 93. Aurangabad cave no. 9, *parinirvāṇa* with four-armed Avalokiteśvara.



Figure 94. Aurangabad cave no. 9, porch, four-armed Avalokiteśvara at the feet of the *parinirvāṇa*.

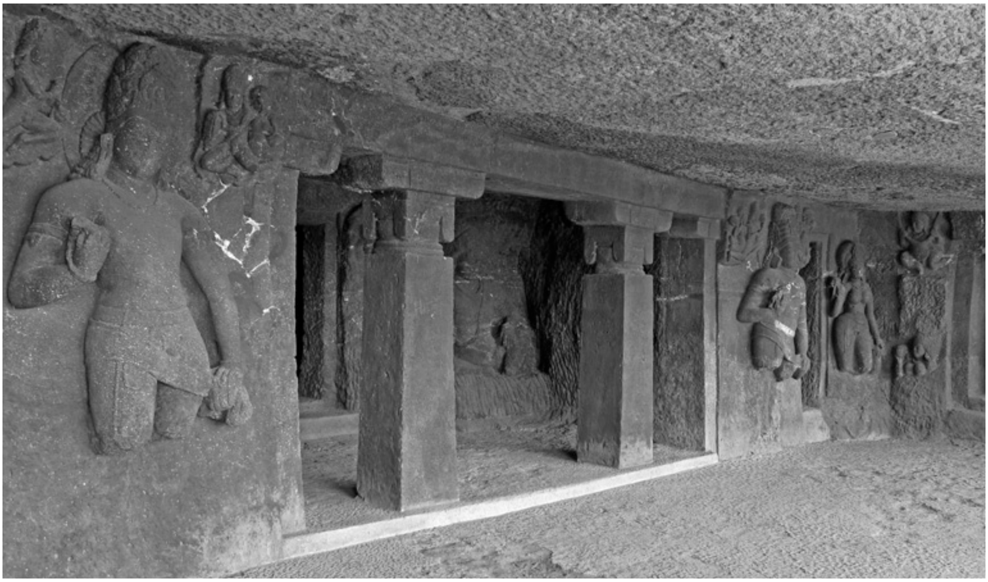


Figure 95. Aurangabad cave no. 9, interior



Figure 96. Aurangabad cave no. 9, interior, left wall with door opening into left vestibule.



Figure 97. Aurangabad cave no. 9, interior, right wall with door opening into right vestibule.



Figure 98. Aurangabad cave no. 9, interior, central vestibule with unfinished guardian figures leading to main shrine with unfinished Buddha.



Figure 99. Aurangabad cave no. 9, interior, entrance to left shrine with *bodhisattvas* and main *bhadrāsana* Buddha.

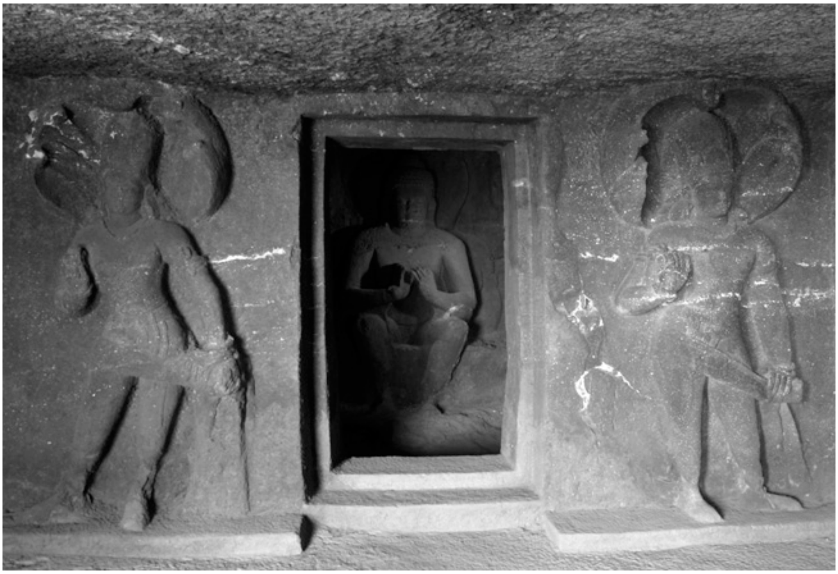


Figure 100. Aurangabad cave no. 9, interior, entrance to right shrine with *nāgarājas* and main *bhadrāsana* Buddha.

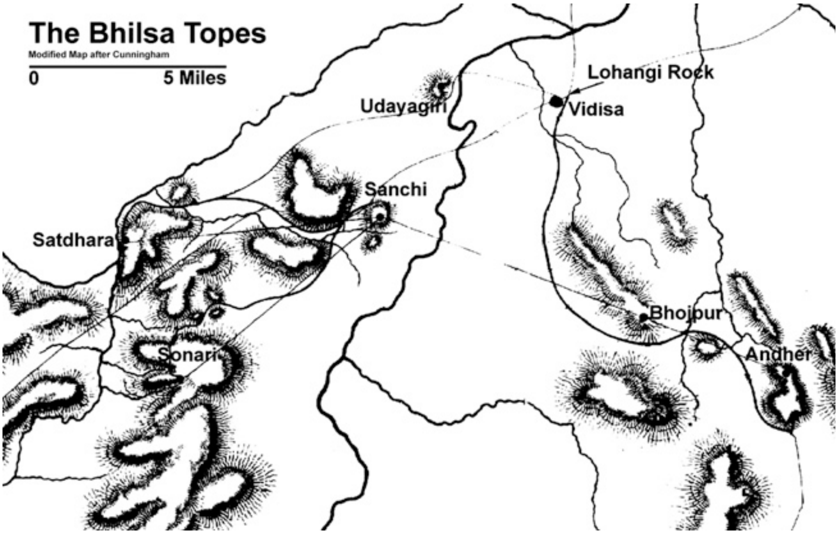


Figure 101. Plan of the Bhilsa Topes. Courtesy of Kurt Behrendt.

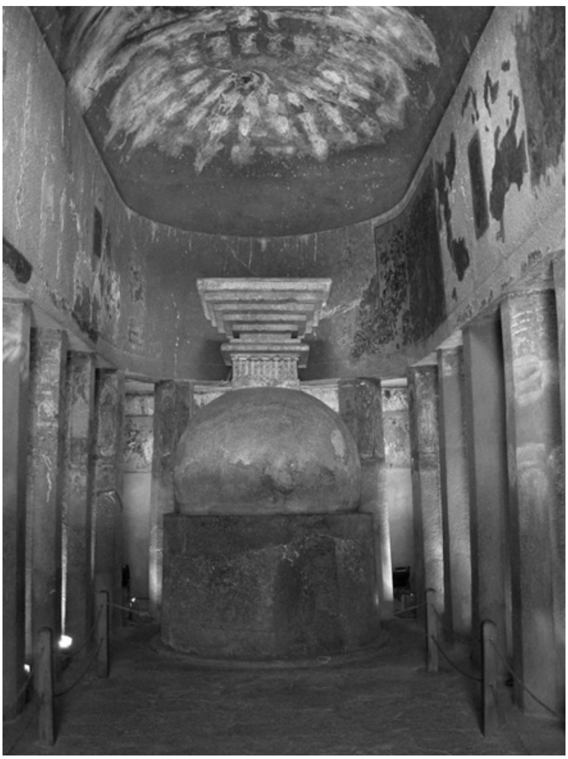


Figure 102. Ajanta *caitya* cave no. 9.

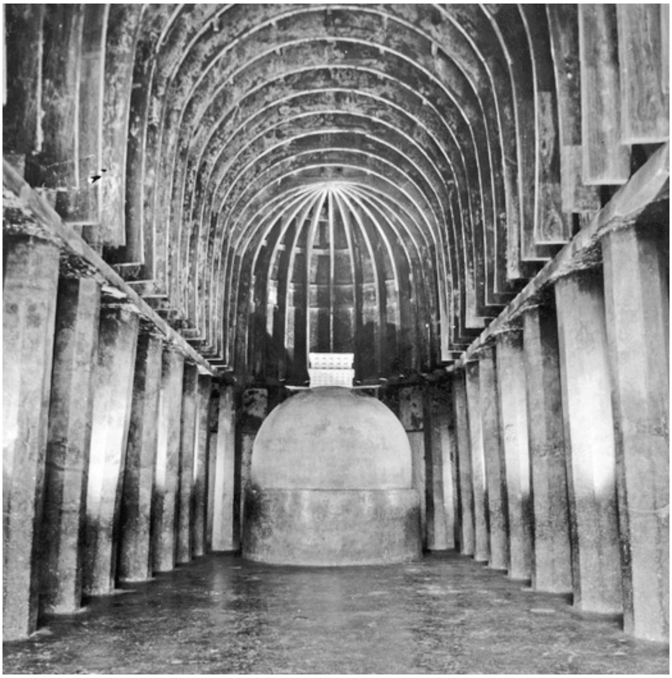


Figure 103. Bhaja *caitya* cave.

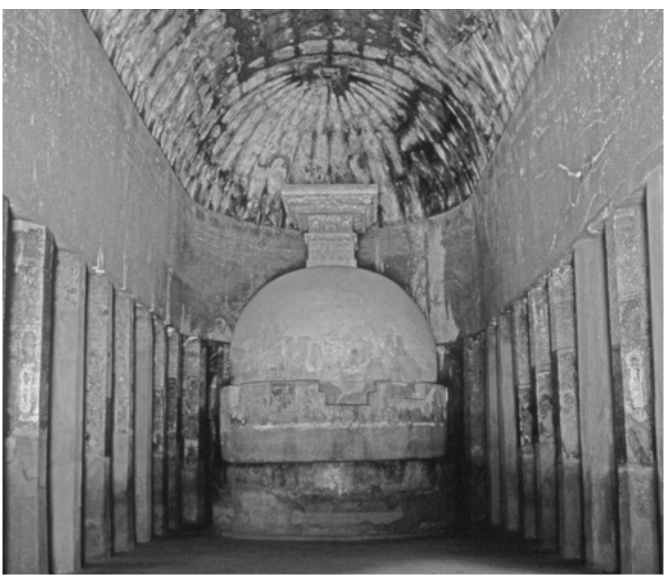


Figure 104. Ajanta *caitya* cave no. 10. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

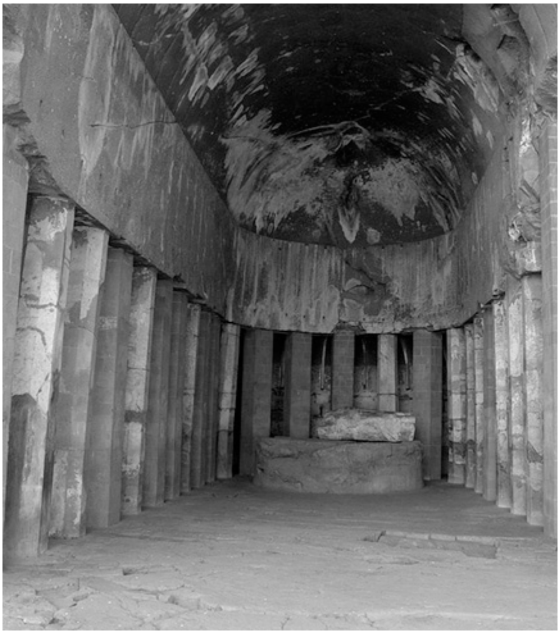


Figure 105. Pitalkhora *caitya* cave no. 3. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

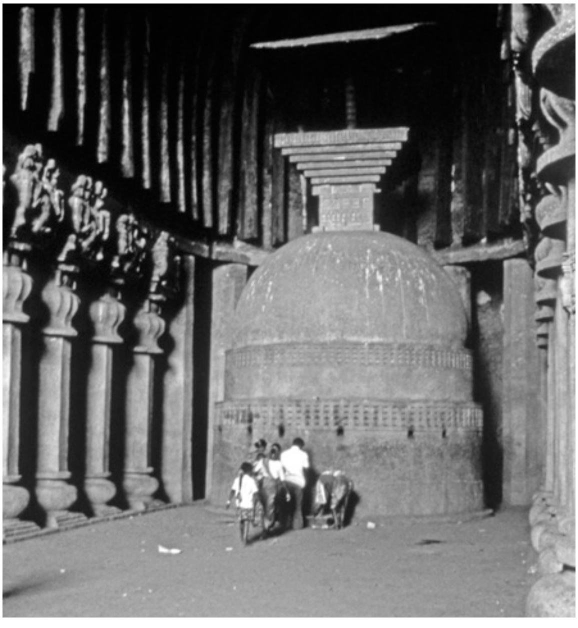


Figure 106. Karli *caitya* cave.

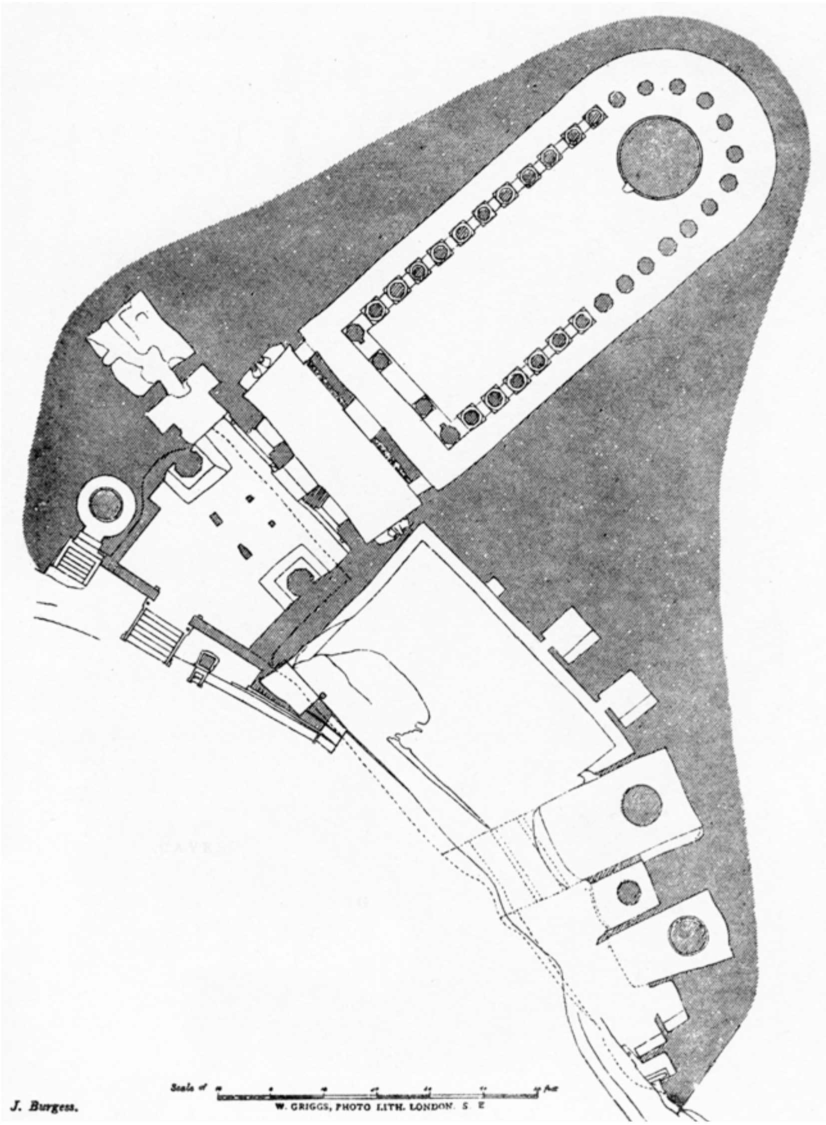


Figure 107. Kanheri, plan of *caitya* hall complex (Burgess 1878).



Figure 108. Kanheri, small *stūpa* cave attached to *caitya* hall.

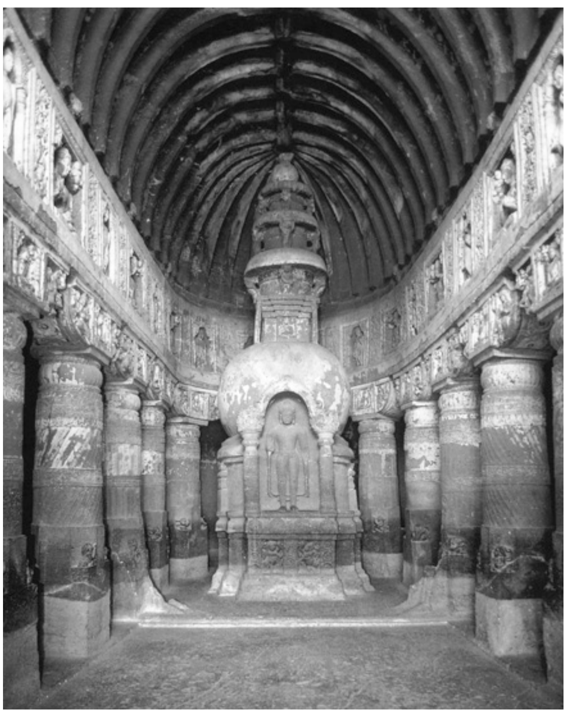


Figure 109. Ajanta *caitya* cave no. 19, interior.



Figure 110. Ajanta *caitya* cave no. 17, interior, shrine antechamber, left wall: detail from painting depicting the Buddha's descent from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven including many foreigners as devotees. Courtesy of the University of Michigan, American Committee for Southern Asian Art Archive.



Figure 111. Ajanta cave no. 17, porch, front wall: detail from painting of the Viśvāntara *jātaka* with foreigner holding a metal ewer and vessel.



Figure 112. Ajanta cave no. 1, interior, ceiling, painting with foreigners in Persian attire drinking wine (so-called Persian embassy scene).

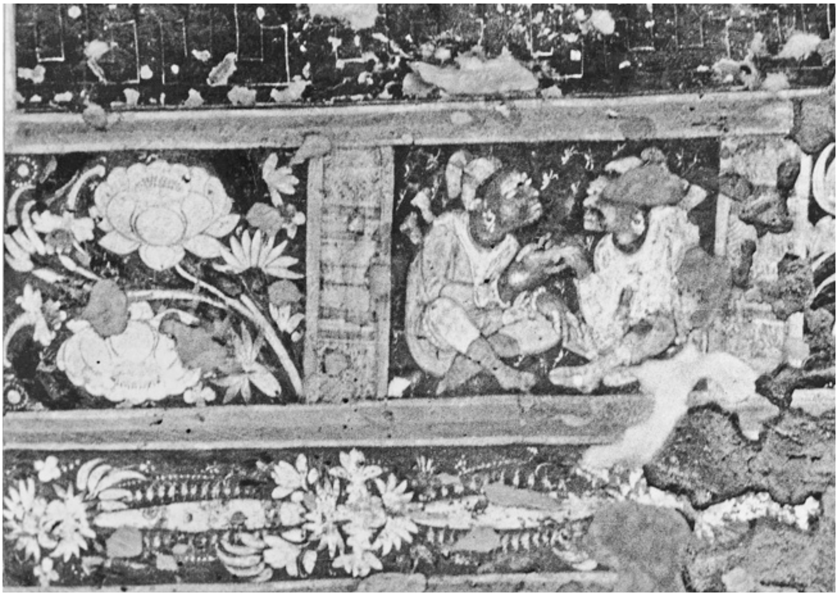


Figure 113. Ajanta cave no. 2, interior, ceiling, painting with foreigners sharing a drink of wine. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

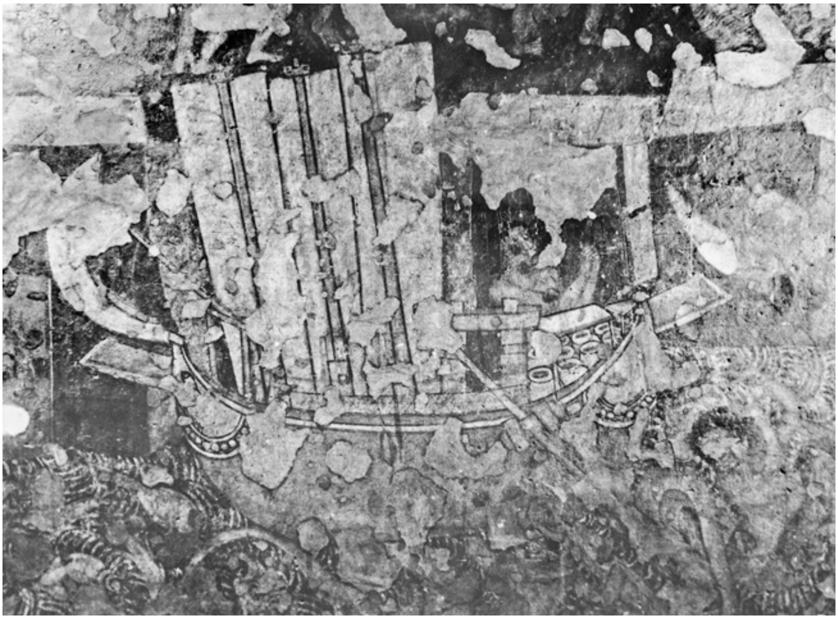


Figure 114. Ajanta cave no. 2, interior, right wall: detail from painting of the *Pūrṇāvadāna* with transoceanic ship transporting *amphorae.*



Figure 115. Ajanta cave no. 26, façade, left, seated *yakṣa* pouring coins.



Figure 116. Ajanta cave no. 1, shrine interior, main *padmāsana* Buddha with small images of devotees carved at the base of the throne. Courtesy of the University of Michigan, American Committee for Southern Asian Art Archive.

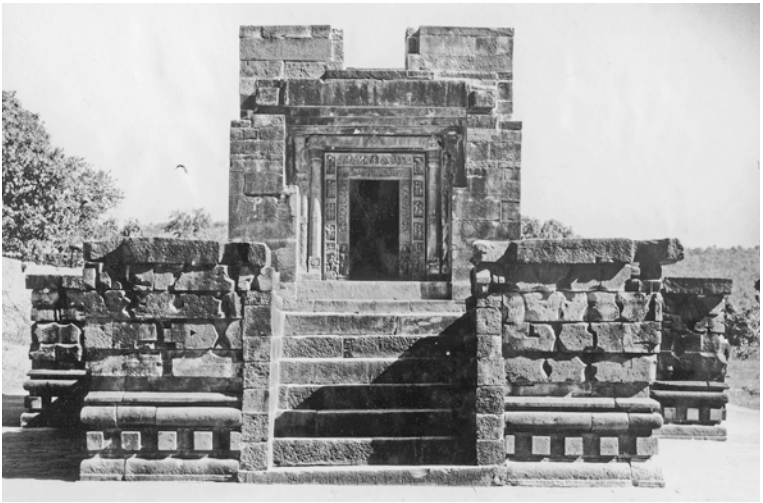


Figure 117. Nachna, Pārvatī Temple. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.



Figure 118. Nachna, Siddh-ka Pahar, *tīrthaṅkara*. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

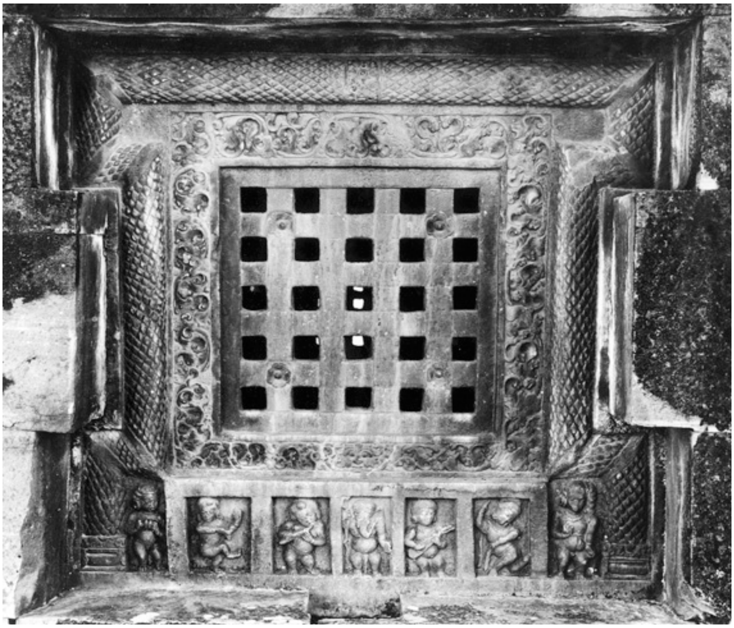


Figure 119. Nachna, Pārvatī Temple, window with *gaṇas* playing musical instruments. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.



Figure 120. Nachna, Pārvatī Temple, window with *nāgas*. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.



Figure 121. Paunar, Balarāma throwing Dhenuka. Courtesy of the University of Michigan, American Committee for Southern Asian Art Archive.



Figure 122. Hadda, Tapa Shotor (Afghanistan), 'Aquatic niche'. Courtesy of Francine Tissot.



Figure 123. Ajanta *caitya* cave no. 19, interior, painted pillar, detail with Buddha in Gandharan style.



Figure 124. Mirpur Khas (Pakistan), terracotta plaque depicting Buddha in *bhadrāsana*. Courtesy of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (former Prince of Wales Museum), Mumbai.



Figure 125. Gandharan Buddha in *bhadrāsana*. Courtesy of The British Museum.



Figure 126. Ajanta *caitya* cave no. 26, interior, *stūpa* with seated Buddha.



Figure 127. Kanheri *caitya* hall, porch, left wall, colossal Buddha in *varādamudrā*. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.



Figure 128. Takht-i-Bahi (Pakistan), lower sacred area V, niches for colossal images. Courtesy of Kurt Behrendt.



Figure 129. Ajanta *caitya* cave no. 19, façade.

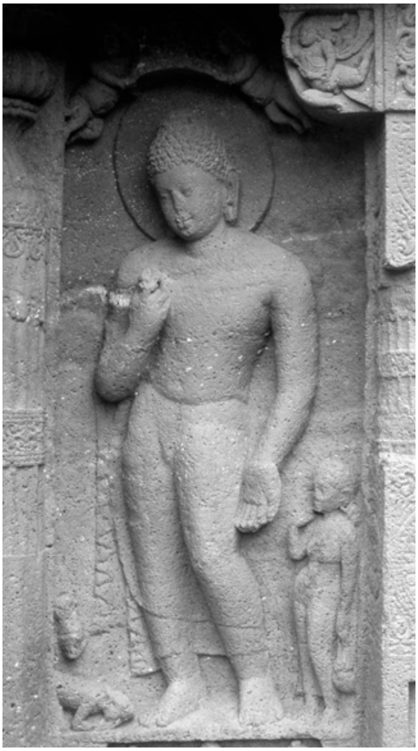


Figure 130. Ajanta *caitya* cave no. 19, façade, detail to the right of the entrance: Dīpaṃkara *jātaka*.



Figure 131. Ajanta *caitya* cave no. 19, façade, detail to the left of the entrance: representation of the episode of the 'Offering of a Handful of Dust.'

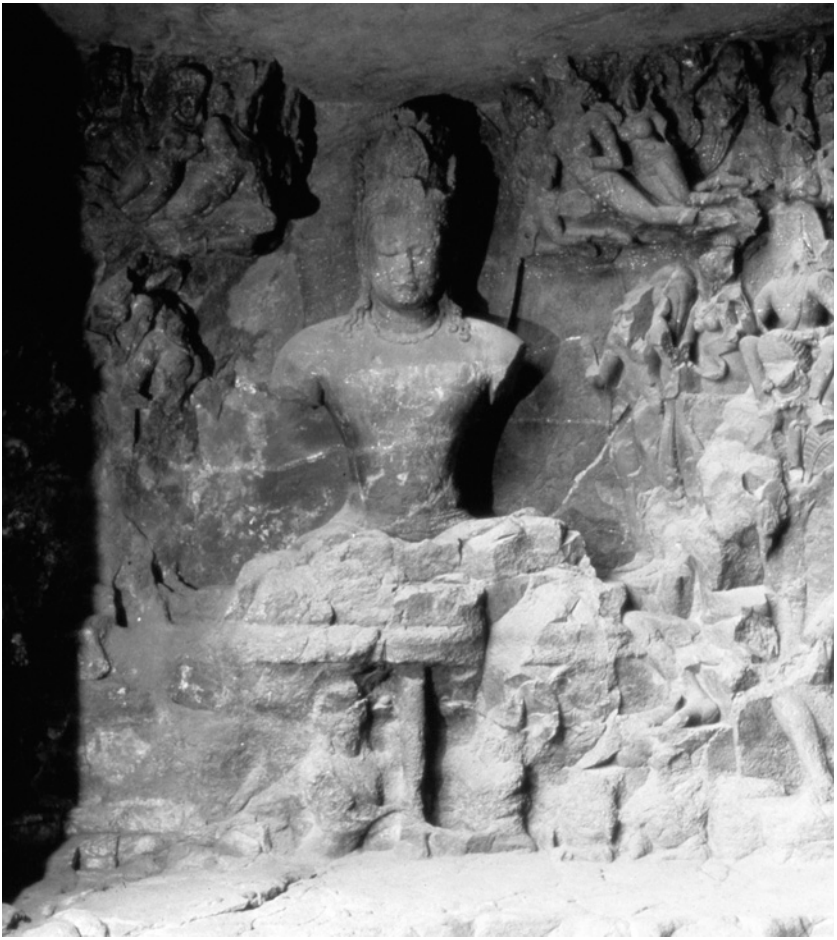


Figure 132. Great Cave at Elephanta, interior, left of the entrance, Śiva as *Mahāyogi*.



Figure 133. Parel *stele*. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

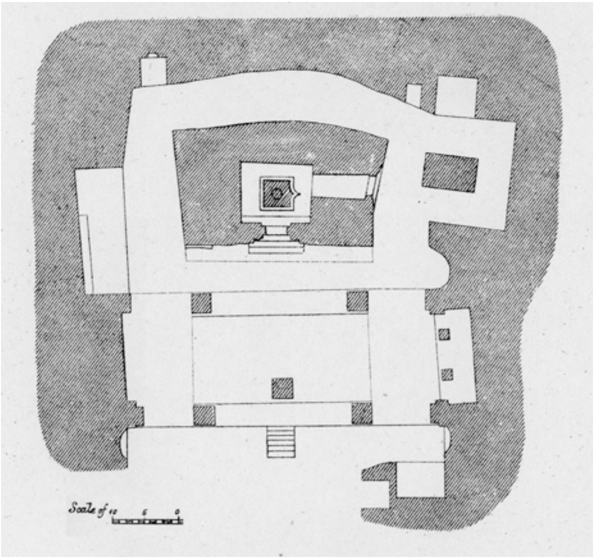


Figure 134. Dhoke, plan of the Śaiva cave (Burgess 1888).



Figure 135. Dhoke, Śaiva cave, interior, guardian figure by the shrine entrance. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

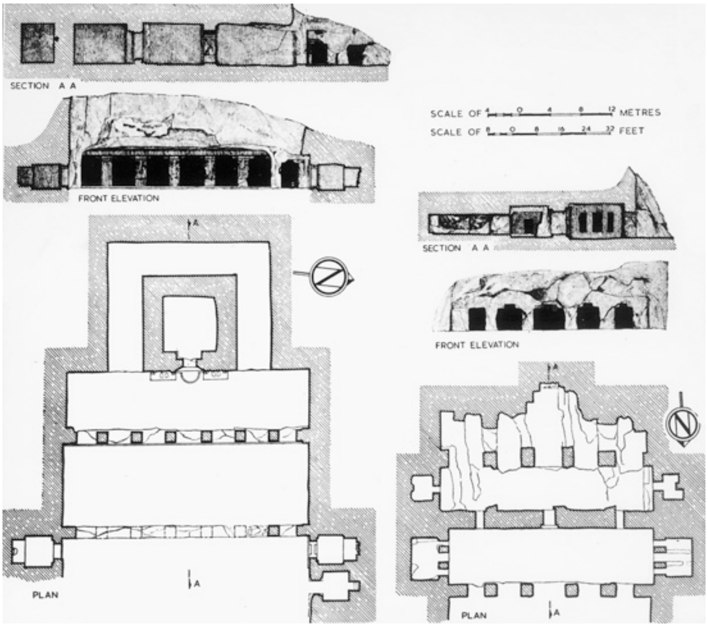


Figure 136. Mahur, plan of the Śaiva caves: so-called Panduleni and unfinished cave. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.



Figure 137. Mahur, Panduleni cave, interior, shrine entrance flanked by guardians. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.



Figure 138. Mahur, Panduleni cave, interior, guardian to the left of shrine entrance. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

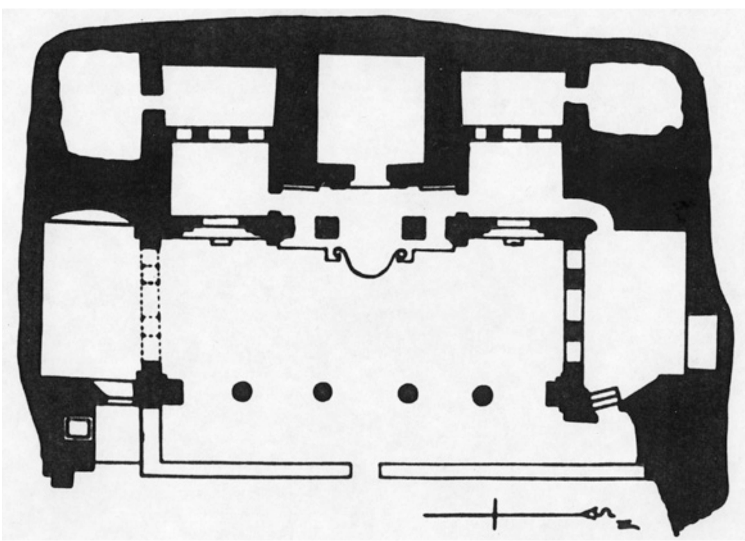


Figure 139. Mandapeshwar, plan of the Śaiva cave. Courtesy of Walter Spink.



Figure 140. Mandapeshwar, Śaiva cave, interior with three shrines. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

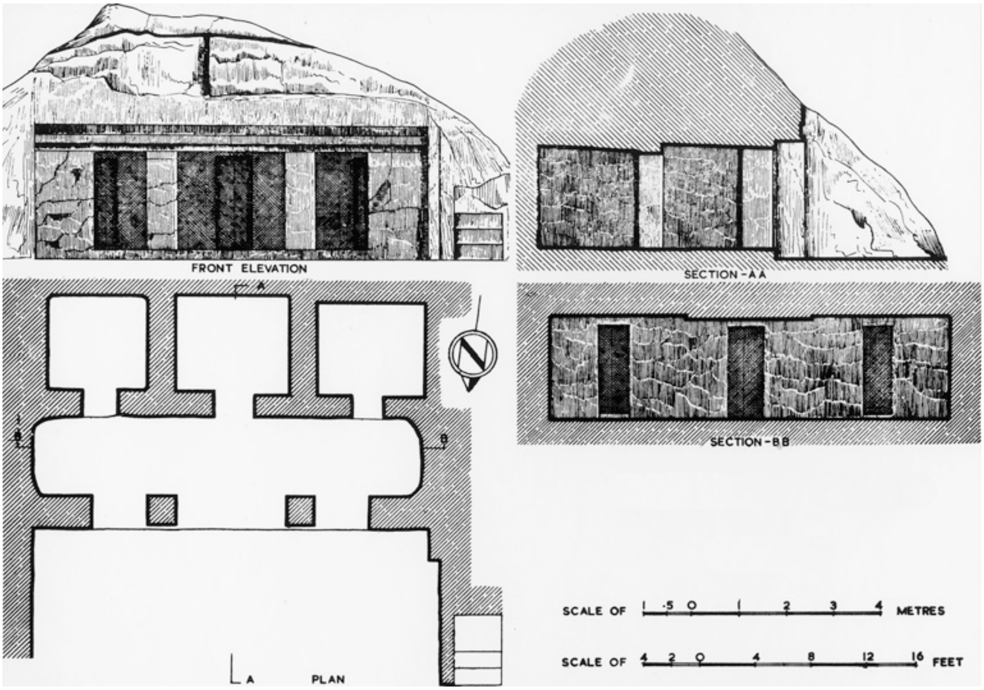


Figure 141. Mogalrajapuram, plan of the Śaiva cave no. 5. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.



Figure 142. Ellora cave no. 29, interior, Lakuliśa.



Figure 143. Gandharan schist relief, 'Conversion of *Nāga* Apalāla' with Vajrapāṇi. Courtesy of The British Museum.



Figure 144. Dhwaka Bahal (Nepal), Vajrapāṇi. Courtesy of Dina Bangdel.



Figure 145. Deogarh, Viṣṇu Temple, Viṣṇu resting on the snake Ananta with *āyudhapuruṣas* below. Courtesy of the University of Michigan, American Committee for Southern Asian Art Archive.



Figure 146. Ellora cave no. 14, interior, Gaja Lakṣmī.

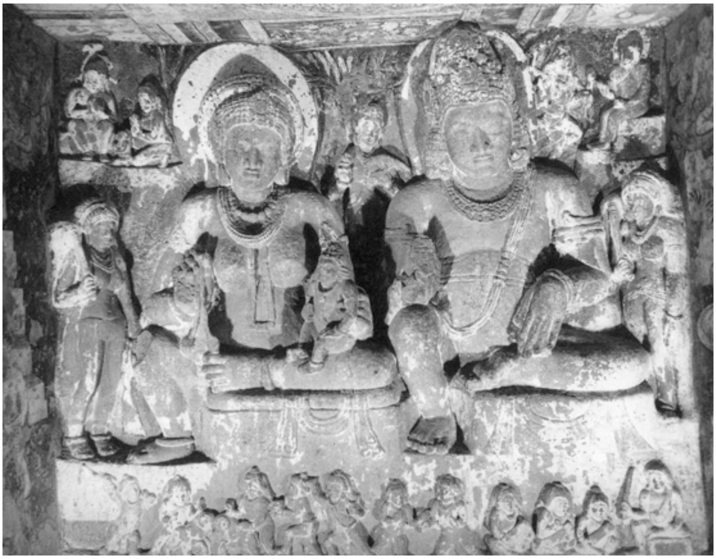


Figure 147. Ajanta cave no. 2, interior, chapel to the right of the shrine, Pāñcika/Jambhala and Hāritī.



Figure 148. Kalyanpur, sculpture with earring depicting female figures with dwarfish attendants. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.



Figure 149. Kalyanpur, sculpture with earring depicting female figures: detail of right earring. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

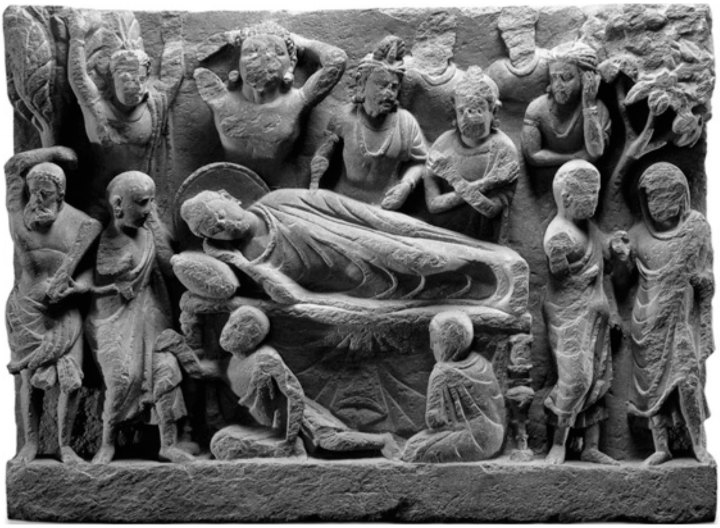


Figure 150. Gandharan schist relief, *parinirvāṇa*. Courtesy of The British Museum.

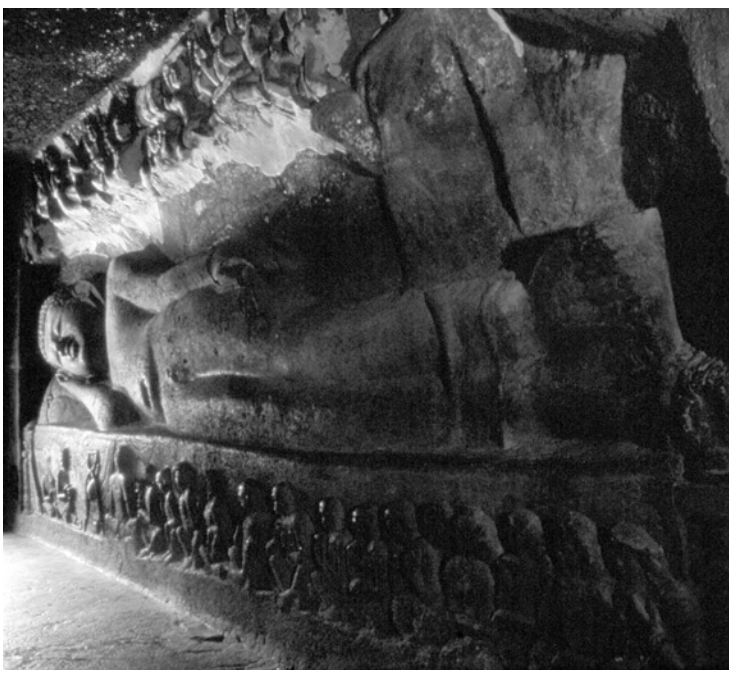


Figure 151. Ajanta cave no. 26, interior, colossal *parinirvāṇa*.



Figure 152. Dhamnar cave no.13, interior, colossal *parinirvāṇa*.

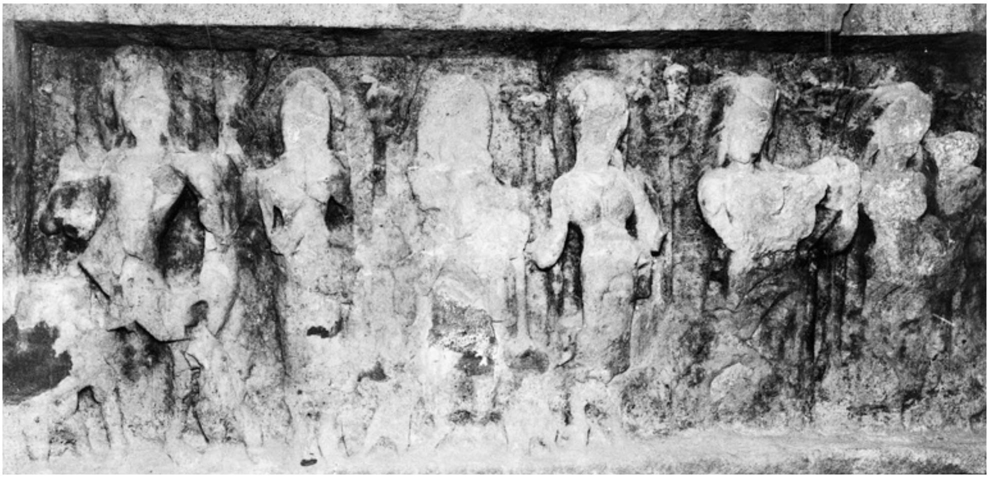


Figure 153. Elephanta, Great Cave, east court, *Saptamātṛkās* carved on the rear wall of the right chapel, left. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

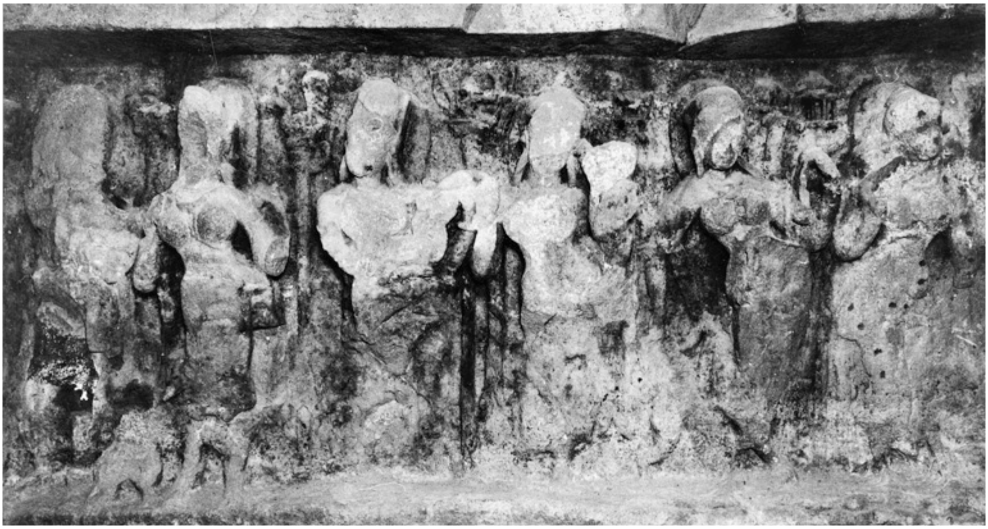


Figure 154. Elephanta, Great Cave, east court, *Saptamātṛkās* carved on the rear wall of the right chapel, middle. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

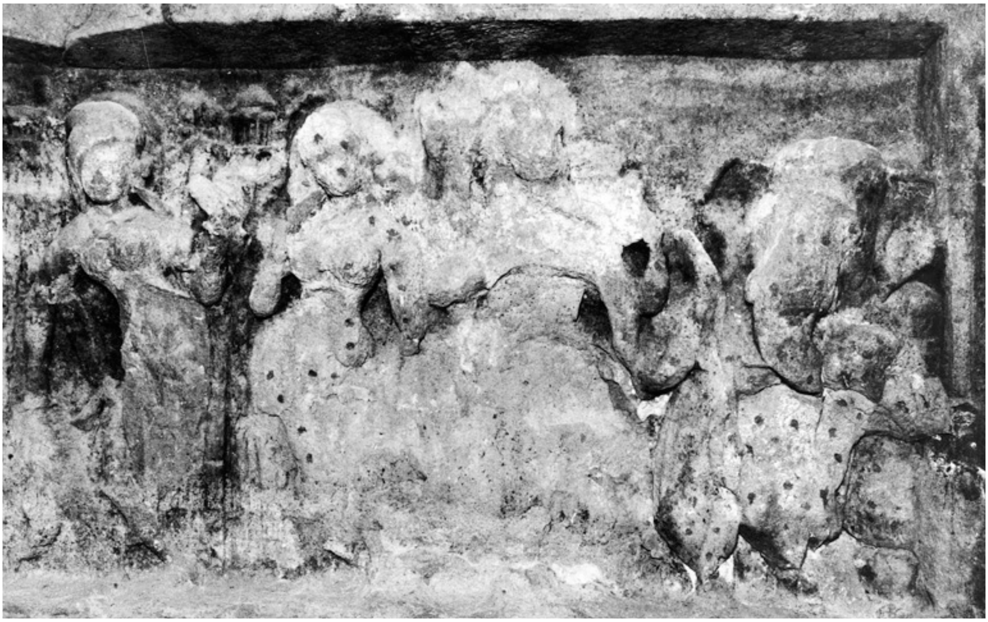


Figure 155. Elephanta, Great Cave, east court, *Saptamātṛkās* carved on the rear wall of the right chapel, right. Courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.



Figure 156. Elephanta, Great Cave, *liṅga* shrine with colossal guardians by the west entrance.



Figure 157. Ellora 21, view of the court with Lajjā Gaurī carved on Nandi pedestal.

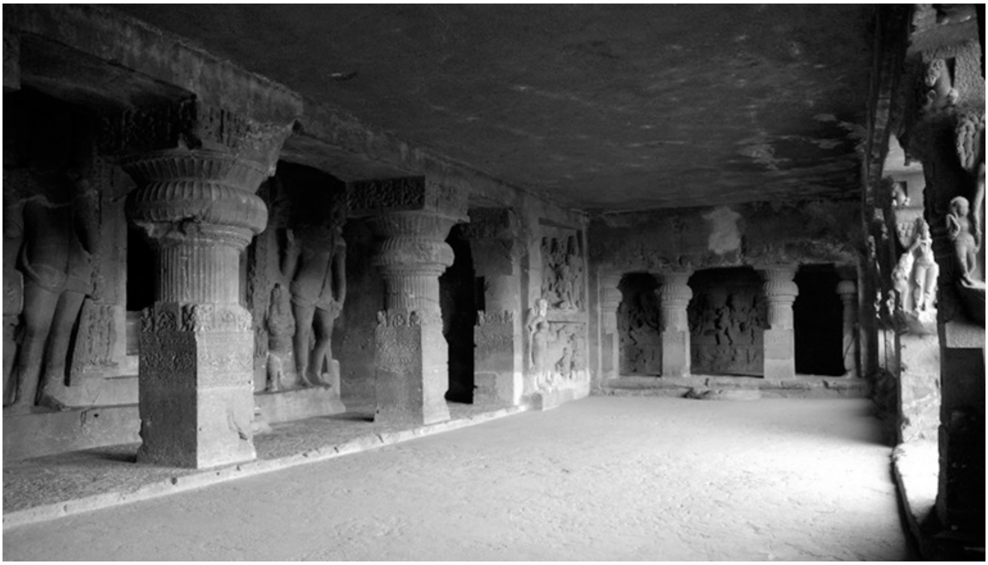


Figure 158. Ellora 21, interior.



Figure 159. Ellora 21, interior, *Saptamātṛkās*.

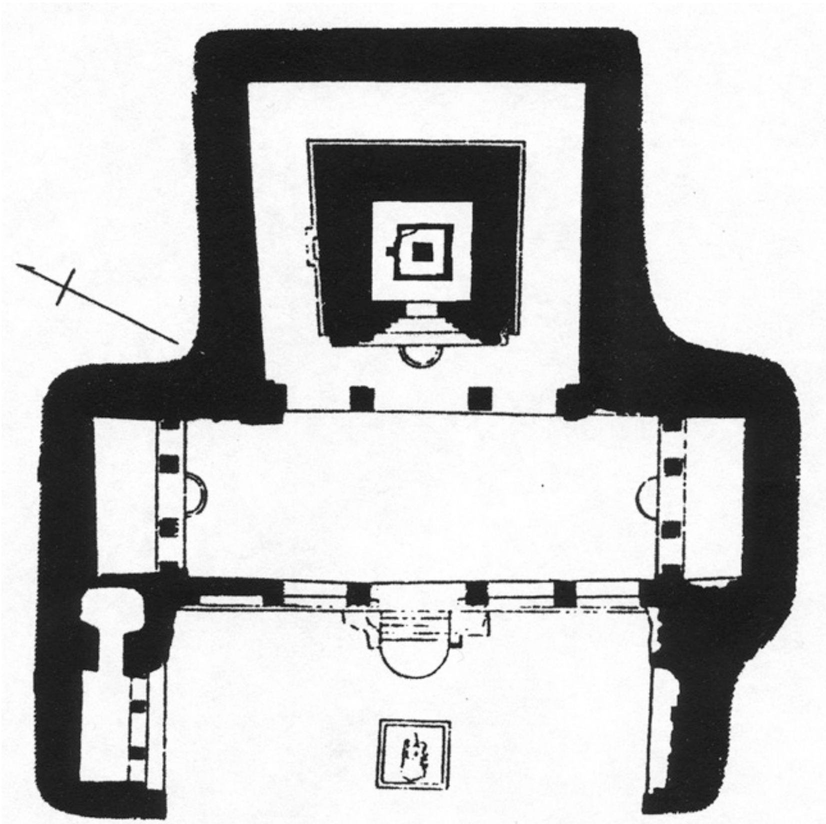


Figure 160. Ellora 21, plan (Burgess 1880).